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Principals and the Decision-Making Process

by

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **PRINCIPALS AND THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS** submitted by Todd Eric Pruden in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Educational Administration and Leadership.

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Abstract

Principals responded to the question concerning their approach to decision-making. In particular, they were asked to describe the circumstances under which they would share, delegate, or take personal responsibility for making a decision.

Data derived from the responses were analyzed to elicit common themes related to the decision-making process. The themes that were discussed in this study were related to the contextual variables of the decision-making process. Considering the contextual variables, the types of decisions, the *guessperience*, and the leadership style, the principal would be able to select a strategy for making a decision. The strategy processes for making decisions include: principal-made decisions, shared decisions, and delegated decisions.

When delegating or sharing decisions, the principals felt that they were ultimately accountable for the decisions; however, they felt it was necessary to put their trust and confidence in their staff members and to empower them to become confident decision makers.

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CHAPTER ONE

Principals and the Decision-Making Process.

Introduction

A concern with "decision-making" is not new to the educational scene. Studies focused on the decision-making process have been undertaken for half a century or more. The most recent trend in decision-making has been to transfer the decision-making authority to the schools themselves. This initiative has been labeled school-based decision-making. The rationale behind this is twofold. First, the people who will be affected by the decisions ought to be involved in the decision-making process itself. Second, those involved in the decision-making process will feel a sense of ownership of their decisions (Yanitski, 1997).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to get an understanding of how decisions are made in schools through investigating why and how principals decide to exercise their decision-making power unilaterally, share their decision-making power, or delegate their decision-making power.

Identification of the Problem

When decisions are made at the school level, how do principals decide when to (a) exercise their decision-making power, (b) share their decision-making power, or (c) delegate their decision-making power?

Sub-Problems

The following sub-problems have emerged from the review of the literature and my own experiences:

1. What considerations assist principals in their decision-making practice?
2. Why and how do principals decide to deal with decisions unilaterally?
3. What kinds of decisions will the principal deal with unilaterally?
4. Why and how do principals decide to share their decision-making authority with others?
5. What kinds of decisions will the principal share with others?
6. Why and how do principals decide to delegate their decision-making authority?
7. What kinds of decisions will the principal delegate?
8. How do generic and unique decisions affect the decision-making process?

Researcher Beliefs

These beliefs are based on my experience in the field of education and in my studies of educational administration and leadership.

First, I believe that principals are ultimately responsible for the decisions made at their school. However, it is impossible for the principal to make every decision in the school for the following reasons. First, since stakeholders are important members of the school community they ought to have a voice regarding different aspects of schooling; the people who will be affected by the decisions ought to be involved in the decision-making

process itself. Second, those involved in the decision-making process will feel a sense of ownership of their decisions and thus the stakeholders will more readily "buy-in" to the decision. Third, the principal does not have enough time to deal with all of the decisions unilaterally. Fourth, the principal may want other members of the organization to develop decision-making skills.

My second belief is that the principal will delegate decisions that have a greater impact on the delegate rather than the principal. The principal would do this to ensure that the person responsible for the decision feels that his or her decision-making ability is valued by the school organization. Also, the principal will delegate decisions to people who possess certain strengths in particular areas. Because the principal is responsible for the decisions made at the school, I believe that he or she will monitor delegated decision.

Third, I believe that many principals will deal with decisions that are urgent and managerial responsibilities that need to be done before the school year begins unilaterally. The principal will make decisions unilaterally because the decision will reflect the philosophical perspective of the principal, and be designed to attain a specific outcome.

Fourth, I believe that unique decisions would be more time consuming and take more preparation than generic decisions.

Definitions of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined as indicated.

Belief. Mental acceptance of and conviction in the truth, actuality, or validity of something (American Heritage Dictionary, 1993).

Delegation. The ability of the principal to pass the decision-making authority to subordinates.

Generic decisions. Decisions that are based on the experience of the decision maker and/or the policies and procedures.

Influences. A power affecting a person, thing, or course of events, especially one that operates without any direct or apparent effort (American Heritage Dictionary, 1993).

School-Based Decision-Making. A process through which major decisions are made at the school level about policies, instructional programs and services, and how funds are allocated to support them.

School Council. "... Collective associations of parents, teachers, principals, staff, students and community representatives who seek to work together to promote the well-being and effectiveness of the entire school community and thereby to enhance student learning. A school council is a means to facilitate cooperation among all the concerned participants in the local school" (Alberta Education, 1995, p. 1).

Shared decisions. Decisions made by the school council, among teachers and the administration or between other stakeholders and the administration.

Stakeholder. Anyone who has a responsibility or stake in the educational system. This includes parents, students, teachers, principals, superintendents, trustees, government, businesses, and other community members.

Unique decisions. Decisions that are made where previously established procedures do not exist.

Values. To regard as important to one's set of beliefs.

Zone of acceptance. The extent to which stakeholders have enough interest and expertise to participate in the decision-making process.

Significance Of The Study

The trend in decentralization has had an impact on the role of the principal. The principal is responsible for even more of the decisions made at the school level. However, even though the principal is ultimately responsible for the decisions made at his or her school, it may be necessary to consider how and why these decisions are being made. When the principal says that he or she will share or delegate a decision, one ought to consider what the principal means by these terms. Does the principal already have a preconceived idea of the anticipated outcome or is he or she

genuinely interested in the outcomes that develop through collaboration or delegation?

Because every principal has an idea of what sharing or delegating decisions actually involves, it is hoped that this study will explain how principals define shared and delegated decisions. Otherwise one must wonder to what extent shared and delegated decisions actually exist. Moreover, we may find that those terms should not be used in the schools. Instead, the terms "advisory decision-making" or "data collection" ought to be used.

This study is significant because it may shed light on why and how administrators make decisions. The conceptual framework developed by the researcher, in conjunction of Drucker's (1966) concepts of unique and generic decisions, demonstrates the researcher's perception of the decision-making process at the school level. Principals choose to make a decision unilaterally or to share or delegate that decision. At this point in the conceptual model, the decisions seem to return to the principal who appears to make the final decision. It will be interesting to see if the decisions made at this point, by the shared or delegated parties, are final or if the principal will have ultimate veto power. If this occurs, sharing and delegating decisions would appear to be used as methods for principals to collect data to make an informed decision. The "sharing" of decisions would become more apparent than real.

Moreover, whether true delegation or true collaboration actually exists is not addressed in the literature. Yanitski (1997) and Hoy and Tarter (1992) discuss the involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process, but do not tell us the outcome of shared or delegated decisions. Sharing and delegating decisions sounds like a collaborative and empowering experience; however, we will ascertain if it actually exists.

Organization of the Thesis

The introduction, purpose, researcher beliefs, and significance of the study are addressed in chapter one. In chapter two, a synthesis of the literature on the nature of decision-making, principal-made decisions, shared decision-making, and delegated decision-making is reviewed. Further, leadership styles, empowerment, and types of decisions will be discussed. The methodology, participants, research procedures, and the data collection techniques used in the study are identified in chapter three. In addition, the delimitations and limitations of the study are discussed. In chapter four, the findings of the study are provided. In the final chapter, chapter five, a summary of the study is discussed. Also, reflections and recommendations for practice, theory, and further research are presented.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

This section provides an overview of the literature regarding decision-making as it pertains to school-based management in public education. This literature review explores how decisions are made at the school level. It is focused on (a) school-based management, (b) the nature of decision-making, (c) responsibilities of the principal according to the School Act, (d) shared decision making , (e) delegation of decision-making power, (f) unique decisions versus generic decisions, and (g) the empowerment of subordinates.

School-Based Decision-Making

There is currently a restructuring being undertaken in the governance of education. The focus of this restructuring is a movement toward the decentralization of education. Decentralization is described as "the systematic and consistent delegation of authority from central office to the schools" (Caldwell, 1977, p. 7). This trend in the decentralization of education is popular among stakeholders in education because as Amundson (1988) suggests, the individuals who are responsible for making decisions are the ones implementing them (cited in Sawchuk, 1993).

Terms such as "site-based management, school-based budgeting, decentralized decision-making, collaborative school management, school-based governance, or local school management" (Delaney, 1994, p. 23)

have all been used to describe the outcome of decentralization; nevertheless they all differ in some respects. Chapman (1990) refers to school-based management as "a form of educational administration in which the school becomes the primary unit for decision-making" (p. xi). Also, Brown describes school-based management

> as a manifestation of decentralization, it means simply that schools within a district are allotted money to purchase supplies, equipment, personnel, utilities, maintenance, and perhaps other services according to their own assessment of what is appropriate. Schools' authority to make decisions such as these is in contrast to standard practices in most districts, which require that such decisions be made at central office. (Brown, 1990, p. vii)

Caldwell (1990) argues that the term self-management refers to "one for which there has been significant and consistent decentralization of authority to make decisions related to the operation of the school" (p. 14). One common theme among all of these definitions is that they focus on the decentralization of education to the individual school level and it is at this level that the decisions affecting schools are being addressed.

The Nature of Decision-Making

Decision-making as defined by Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn (1997) is "the process of choosing among alternative choices" (p. 185). It is one of the responsibilities of the executive of the organization. In the school setting, the principal is ultimately accountable for the decision-making. With the decentralization of education to the school level, the principal has more responsibilities which will directly and indirectly have

an impact on the educational experiences of the students. With the decentralization of the educational system, the principal does not have to make decisions alone. Depending on the decision-making style of the principal, he or she may choose to include others in the decision-making process. Yanitski (1997) discusses the use of stakeholders in the decision-making process depending on whether they have a legitimate affiliation with the school. Those groups with a legitimate affiliation with the school may be directly involved in the decision-making. Conversely, those whose legitimacy with the educational system is suspect, may not be directly involved. Thus, Yanitski (1997) classified stakeholders into two categories: legitimate and nonlegitimate groups.

Stakeholders such as teachers, parents, students, and the members of the community are being involved in the decision-making processes more now than in the past. With these various stakeholders being involved in the decision-making processes, the principal needs to find a means through which he or she can involve them and determine to what extent these stakeholders can play a role or have some influence in the decision-making process.

Owens (1995) argues that the principal is at times forced to decide whether he or she ought to make decisions alone or whether to involve the organization. Because the principal is thought to be "decisive" he or she is expected to "make decisions swiftly, without delay or temporizing, and

clearly, with minimum ambiguity" (p. 171). As the principal makes a decision, it is expected to reflect the needs of everyone who will be affected by the decision. There would be no need for consultation with other stakeholders since the principal is the decision maker. Thus, decisions that are made will reflect the idiosyncratic behavior of the principal.

On the other hand, because administration or leadership is defined as "working with and through other people to achieve organizational goals, it is important to consider the mechanisms by which the organization (and not merely the individual) deals with decision making" (Owens, 1995, p. 171). The term *organization* needs to be expanded to include not only the principal, teachers, students, support staff, custodial staff, secretarial staff, and the central office personnel, but also parents, business owners, and members of the community. Owens suggests that the decisions that the principal makes are irrelevant, "whereas the 'behavior' of the organization is highly proximate and relevant. In this view - while administrator may be seen as implicated - the vital decision-making functions are organizational" (Owens, 1995, p. 171).

Moreover, Owens (1995) suggests that decision-making practices are the choices of the principal who decides how decisions will be made within his or her organization. These choices are related to assumptions of principals on issues such as:

- what motivates people at work;
- the relative values of collaboration vs. directiveness in the exercise of leadership;
- the desirability of a full flow of information up, down, and across the organization;
- the best ways of maintaining organizational control and discipline;
- the values of involving people throughout all levels of the organization in decision making. (Owens, 1995, p. 172)

Responsibilities of the Principal According to the Alberta School Act (1996)

The Alberta School Act (1996) states the responsibilities of the principal very clearly. The responsibilities are stated in the following manner:

> A principal of a school must
>
> (a) provide instructional leadership in the school;
>
> (b) ensure that the instruction provided by the teachers employed in the school is consistent with the courses of study and education programs prescribed, approved or authorized pursuant to this Act;
>
> (c) evaluate or provide for the evaluation of programs offered in the school;
>
> (c.1) ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of education set by the Minister;
>
> (d) direct the management of the school;
>
> (e) maintain order and discipline in the school and on the school grounds and during activities sponsored or approved by the board;
>
> (f) promote co-operation between the school and the community that it serves;
>
> (g) supervise the evaluation and advancement of students;

> (h) evaluate the teachers employed in the school;
>
> (i) subject to any applicable collective agreement and the principal's contract of employment, carry out those duties that are assigned to the principal by the board in accordance with the regulations and the requirements of the school council and the board. (Alberta Education, 1996, p. 21)

Among these responsibilities, the principal makes decisions that may be based on experience and "gut feeling."

Intuition and Principal-Made Decisions

Intuition of the principal is thought to be an important factor in principal-made decisions. It is related to the concept of a "gut feeling" that many decision makers possess. Schermerhorn, Hunt, and Osborn (1997) describe intuition as "the ability to know or recognize quickly the possibilities of a situation" (p. 363). Mintzberg adds that principals are more likely to coalesce the data rather than to analyze them as they try to ascertain the big picture which they need to make a decision (Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn, 1997). In addition, Schermerhorn, Hunt, and Osborn believe that both a systematic approach to solving problems and intuitive decision-making are useful when making decisions (1997).

Furthermore, Salloum (1993) found that implicit knowledge was a factor in the decision-making of senior secondary school principals. That is, when the principal made a decision in the school there were instances where he or she used "something *else* which people use to make decisions [italics added]" (p. 27).

Although may of the decisions are based on the implicit knowledge of the principal. The principal also has to make the decision how to involve others in the decision-making process.

A Model For Shared Decision-Making in Schools

The principal needs to determine the extent to which he or she will allow stakeholders to participate in decisions. If the stakeholders are involved in every decision, they may not have any relevance or expertise in most of the decisions. Hoy and Tarter (1995) expanded upon Bridges (1967) concept of zone of acceptance and involvement. Bridges (1967) postulates that

> 1. as the administrator involves teachers in making decisions located within their zone of acceptance, participation will be less effective, and
> 2. as the administrator involves teachers in making decisions clearly located outside of their zone of acceptance, participation will be more effective. (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p. 328)

The problem for the principal is to ascertain an individual stakeholder's zone of acceptance. Hoy and Tarter (1995) expanded this to include

> 3. As subordinates are involved in making decisions for which they have marginal expertise, their participation will be marginally effective.
> 4. As subordinates are involved in making decisions for which they have marginal interest, their participation will be marginally effective. (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, 329)

To assist the principal with decisions which fall within and outside of the stakeholder's zone of acceptance, Bridges (1967) developed two tests: (a) the test of relevance and (b) the test of expertise. The test of relevance

relates to whether a stakeholder has a personal stake in the decision. If the stakeholder has a personal stake in the decision, there is a high possibility that the individual will participate in the decision-making process. The test of expertise pertains to whether an individual stakeholder is qualified to make such a decision or whether the individual has any experience in the outcome of the decision. If the stakeholder does not have any experience with such a decision, it will cause the individual unnecessary frustration (Hoy & Miskel, 1991). Moreover, Hoy and Tarter (1995) added a further test, which is the test of commitment. It asks "are subordinates committed to the mission of the organization? And can they be trusted to make decisions in the best interest of the organization" (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p. 292). Thus, whether the stakeholders' involvement in the decision-making process will have a positive or negative effect on the organization, can be assessed by determining the individual stakeholder's zone of acceptance, experience in dealing with a particular issue, expertise with similar issues, and commitment to the mission of the school.

Shared Decision-Making

At the beginning of this review of the literature, various forms of decentralization were reviewed. However, it is necessary to differentiate further among decentralization, site-based management and shared decision-making, as these terms are incorrectly used interchangeably. In a study conducted by Liontos (1993), decentralization was described as

> the transfer of authority to local school units; whether decisions are shared at the school level is at the discretion of the principal. Thus decentralization may or may not include shared decision-making. The same is true of site-based management, which can refer solely to the concept of decentralization - a shift in power from district offices to individual school buildings. Site-based management may also include shared decision-making, but shared decision-making is not a necessary component of site-based management. (pp. 1 - 2)

Liontos adopted a definition of shared decision-making (SDM) developed by Bauer (1992):

> Shared decision making is a process designed to push education decisions to the school level, where those closest to the children may apply their expertise in making decisions that will promote school effectiveness and ensure that the most appropriate services are provided to students and the school community. (Liontos, 1993, p. 2)

Bauer added that shared decision-making is content-free. In other words, it does not deal with specific topics or programs. Instead, it is a process of making decisions, in which the stakeholders who have the greatest knowledge of the cognitive, psychomotor, and attitudinal abilities of the students, and thus are in the best position to make the decisions which affect the students' learning outcomes and experiences.

Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn (1997) defined consultative decisions as those decisions that "are made by one individual after seeking input from or consulting with members of a group" (p. 367). Thus, other opinions are solicited from the stakeholders and a decision is made which reflects these views of the community of the organization.

Liontos (1993) indicated that

> the primary purpose of shared decision-making is not to make teachers feel more satisfied with their work, notes Bauer, though it may have this effect. As a result of shared decision-making, staff should have a greater impact on decisions, be better informed, and have greater commitment to making their decisions work. The purpose of SDM is to improve the quality of educational services and to ensure that schools are more responsive to the needs of students and the community. (p. 10)

According to Liontos (1993), all shared decision-making processes are built on common premises or beliefs. Some of the premises are as follows

1. Those closest to the students and "where the action is" will make the best decisions about students' education.
2. Teachers, parents, and school staff should have more say about policies and programs affecting their schools and children.
3. Those responsible for carrying out decisions should have a voice in determining those decisions.
4. Change is most likely to be effective and lasting when those who implement it feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the process. (p. 11)

Similarly, Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn (1997) discuss the three important aspects of working together:

> (1) deciding who is a member and who is not; (2) developing an informal understanding of acceptable and unacceptable behavior; and (3) separating friends from enemies. (p. 268)

These three aspects help ascertain a unique identity for the group. In schools, however, this unique identity is already established by the community that exists at the school and it is up to the community members themselves to ensure that each member is contributing in a supportive, productive manner. The community of the school normally consists of

principals, vice-principals, teachers, support staff, and other community members.

Concerning shared decision-making, the literature suggests that both advantages and disadvantages exist. On the one hand, Kshensky and Muth (1991) suggest that "collaborative decision-making processes are time consuming, inefficient, and inconsistent with strong leadership. Many principals, for example, fear that allowing teachers to assume leadership will erode their own power and reduce their management prerogatives" (p. 4). They go on to state that other principals also feel that sharing power with teachers contradicts expectations for their performance, particularly when they have been exhorted to provide "strong instructional leadership" (p. 4). Thus, some believe that if the leader of the school were to empower others to make decisions they would weaken their own leadership positions.

Another disadvantage is that along with collaborative decision-making comes an additional workload for the principal and the staff members, as the principal has to determine who will be involved, why they will be involved and how they will be involved. Similarly, the teachers must take time away from their planning, marking, and other classroom responsibilities to be involved in administrative decision-making. In exercising leadership principals have to decide the extent to which they will involve teachers. Collaborative decision making can be cumbersome since

it takes time and energy away from teaching (Sackney & Dibski, 1994; Blase, Blase, Anderson, & Dungan 1995).

On the other hand, Myers argues that "ideally, the relocated authority empowers schools to make decisions which influence, in positive ways, the core tasks of schools, the education of students, and which facilitates shared decision-making processes by site participants such as staff and parents" (Myers, 1997, p. 13). In addition Liontos (1993) indicates that "more satisfying decisions are made in groups that generated and tested ideas than are made by individuals or poorly functioning groups" (p. 13). Further, Liontos (1993) argues that shared decision-making has the potential to improve the quality of decisions. Moreover, it will bolster their acceptance and implementation, strengthen staff morale and teamwork, build trust, and increase school effectiveness. Blase et al (1995) sum it up by saying that

> when teachers and other stakeholders engage the principal and one another in authentic and open dialogue about what really matters, principals unanimously agree that outcomes improve when both teachers and principals collectively share the responsibility to initiate action and to make things better. (p. 10)

It is suggested that teacher participation in site-based decision-making gives administration access to critical information closest to the source of many dilemmas in education. Also, as teachers work with students on a daily basis, they would have a greater awareness of the students' needs (Conley, Shmidle, & Shedd, 1998; Smylie, 1992; Charles &

Karr-Kidwell, 1995). Other benefits of shared decision-making included increased levels of worker and job satisfaction as manifested in lower absence, tardiness, and reduced conflicts (Charles & Karr-Kidwell, 1995).

Leadership Styles

In schools, every principal will utilize a leadership style that is conducive to the way he or she operates a school. Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn (1997) discuss Robert J. House's (1977) Path-Goal Theory of Leadership. This theory focuses on the method of how the principal influences the perceptions of the subordinates understanding of work and personal goals and the connections or paths found between these goals.

In House's leadership approach (figure 1), the path-goal relationships exist between three major factors: leadership factors, contingency factors, and subordinate outcomes. Leadership factors consist of directive, supportive, achievement oriented, and participative leadership behaviors. Contingency factors are composed of two groups: subordinate attributes and work-setting attributes. According to Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn (1997), "the leader's behaviors are adjusted to complement the situational contingency variables in order to influence subordinate satisfaction, acceptance of the leader, and motivation for task performance.

Leadership Factors	Contingency Factors	Subordinate Outcomes
Leadership behaviors: Directive Supportive Achievement oriented Participative	Subordinate Attributes: Authoritarianism Internal-external orientation Ability Work-Setting Attributes: Task Formal authority system Primary work group	Job satisfaction: Job leads to valued rewards Acceptance of leader: Leader leads to valued rewards Motivational Behavior: Expectancy that effort leads to performance. Instrumentally that such performance is the path to valued rewards

Figure 1. Summary of major goal-path relationships in House's leadership approach. (Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn, 1997, p. 322)

Another taxonomy of leadership styles was developed by Vroom and Yetton (1973). This taxonomy is described as follows:

Autocratic Process

AI. Leader (manager, administrator) makes the decision using whatever information is available.

AII. Leader secures necessary information from the members of the group, then makes the decision. In obtaining the information, the leader may or may not tell followers what the problem is.

Consultative Process

CI. Leader shared the problem with relevant members of the group on a one-to-one basis, getting their ideas and suggestions individually without bringing them together as a group; then the leader makes the decision.

CII. Leader shares the problem with members as a group at a meeting, then decides.

Group Process

> GII. Leader, acting as chairperson at a meeting of the group, shares the problem with the group and facilitates efforts of the group to reach consensus on a group decision. Leader may give information and express opinion but does not try to "sell" a particular decision or manipulate the group through cover means. (Owens, 1995, pp. 176-177)

This style of leadership is attempting to match appropriate leadership behavior with specific situations that exist in various schools.

Both leadership models are useful in determining which leadership style would be more appropriate under given circumstances.

The leadership style of the principal also determines the extent to which decisions are delegated to subordinates.

Delegation

Delegation refers to the ability of the principal to pass the decision making authority to subordinates. The standard answer to the question "Why delegate?" is because the principal does not have enough time to accomplish all of the assigned tasks and therefore must delegate the decision-making authority to subordinates. This is an essential aspect of decision-making as more schools move towards school-based management, more tasks are becoming the responsibilities of the individual schools. Moreover, it allows the principal to prepare other staff members looking towards administrative positions in the future (Thomas, 1989). Thus, this preparation can be accomplished by effectively delegating decisions to

subordinates. It would give them first hand experience with the decisions that administrators deal with on a daily basis.

Thomas (1989) suggests that an important reason for delegating decisions is because there may be staff members who possess skills or talents that would enable them to accomplish certain tasks more effectively. Thus, by delegating decisions to such persons would improve the efficiency of the operation, and at the same time provide recognition for the staff members for their skills or talents.

Also, delegation "provides opportunities for principals to build greater school involvement by permitting decision making by those closest to the problems" (Richardson, Short & Prickett, 1993, p. 101). Delegation like shared decision-making provides opportunities for the teacher to clarify the problem, develop alternate possibilities, and become responsible for the result of the decision. Moreover, with the increased responsibility, the role of the teacher changes. This change may result in higher teacher satisfaction and job enhancement. In addition, "delegation can foster commitment to and ownership of the school organization" (Richardson, Short, & Prickett, 1993, p. 102).

On the other hand, Yukl (1990) suggests that "delegation may not necessarily increase the quality of the decision, a benefit of shared decision making (Short & Greer, 1988). Rather, he suggests that delegation often

results in expedient decisions" (Richardson, Short & Prickett, 1993, p. 102).

According to Thomas (1989), what decisions the principal chooses to delegate to subordinates ought to be selected purposefully. With the assignment of trivial tasks to others time might be conserved; however, it will not allow individuals the opportunity to use their unique skills or talents or provide them with experience. Thomas goes on to say that at time it may be necessary to delegate low-skill tasks, but that should not be the extent that decisions are delegated in the school.

Furthermore, Thomas (1989) explains that the decisions delegated to others ought to provide learning experiences for the individuals. For example, if the vice principal assumes the responsibility for a school activity and does an outstanding job, the principal may be tempted to delegate this activity to the vice principal every year instead of rotating the responsibility to other staff members. Even with a successfully executed event, the vice principal will need to have other learning experiences.

Another consideration for assigned responsibilities is the consequences of an unsuccessful delegation activity. A responsibility that failed may cause a loss of confidence or status for the individual, a loss of time, efficiency, or morale within the school, and it may give the school a negative image. Thus, the wise principal would carefully match selected

decisions to the individuals who have the skills and or talents necessary to deal with the responsibility (Thomas, 1989).

Thomas (1989) identifies two methods of delegation that are a part of a school, namely: job descriptions and minutes of meetings. In effect, the job descriptions for various members is a method of delegating responsibilities to those staff members. When the principal is hiring new staff, he or she ought to consider what to include in the job description before hiring a staff member.

The minutes of meetings provide documentation of what decisions were assigned, who was assigned a specific decision, and other factors that relate to the decisions that were delegated (Thomas, 1989).

Some of the limitations of delegation are also mentioned in the literature. First, some teachers prefer being given direction. They do not want to bother with the extra authority. Some teachers are overworked or stressed, some lack the time, and some teachers feel that they do not know how to make a good decision (Richardson, Short, & Prickett, 1993).

Another limitation of delegation is that some principals do not want to risk losing some of the control over the school. As the principal loses control over certain areas in the school, another staff member may be gaining that lost control (Richardson, Short & Prickett, 1993).

Yukl (1990) suggests a few factors principals ought to consider when delegating the decision-making authority. The points raised by Yukl are as follows:

> (1) determine how much authority is necessary; (2) insure teacher comprehension; (3) obtain teacher acceptance of responsibilities; (4) monitor teacher progress; (5) provide assistance and psychological support; and (6) discourage excessive dependence. (cited in Richardson, Short, & Prickett, 1993, p. 103)

The extent to which the principal delegates decisions, shares decisions, or makes decisions unilaterally may relate to whether the decision is generic or unique.

Generic Versus Unique Decisions

The type of decision usually affects how the decision will be dealt with by the principal. Drucker (1966) categorizes decisions into generic decisions and unique decisions. Generic decisions are described as decisions that have arisen from previous policy, procedures, and principles, as well as by the experience of the principal. These decisions relate to problems that are routinely solved by these previous established rules and regulations and experience. "The organization has established mechanisms and procedures for dealing with problems" (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p. 273). Generic problems should not be thought of as unimportant, the importance of the decision is not an aspect of being generic. It means that these problems occur frequently and thus polices, procedures, and guidelines have been developed to assist the principal in making these decisions.

Similarly, Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn (1997) discussed routine decisions. These routine decisions or programmed decisions could be made expediently because a solution of many of these decisions have been determined past experience.

On the other hand, unique decisions are decisions that the principal has to deal with that are not adequately answered by a previously established procedure or policy. The principal may need to utilize a creative problem solving solution (Hoy & Miskel, 1996). Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn (1997) describe unique solutions as requiring more "information processing" to make the decision work because many of these decisions have not been encountered in the past. Normally, creative problem solving skills are necessary to deal with such decisions.

Hoy and Miskel (1996) describe two common mistakes administrators need to guard against:

> 1. Treating a routine situation as if it were a series of unique events
> 2. Treating a new event as if it were just another old problem to which old procedures should be applied. (p. 273)

Empowerment of Subordinates

Kshensky and Muth discussed Shulman's (1993) definition of leadership, "enlisting the willing participation of teachers as collaborating allies rather than as unwilling subordinates grudgingly conceding to their lack of power" (p. 17). In this situation, the principal can be the one who empowers herself or himself and the staff by creating a "partnership in

excellence." With the sharing of decisions, the collectivity of the input of the decision makers is what creates a powerful decision.

Another partnership addressed by Kshensky and Muth (1991) was developed through mutual empowerment. Mutual empowerment refers to the effect of sharing the power between teachers and principals. It was reflected in the level of communication among teachers and between teachers and principals. They referred to communications among teachers as horizontal communication and communication between teachers and administrators as vertical communication. They demonstrated that the synergistic relationship between both types of communication may reflect the synergy that may also develop from mutual or reciprocal empowerment processes. Further, they suggested that this power should not be viewed as a "rope in a tug-of war," which for one side to win the other side must either end up face down in the mud or give up their end of the rope. Instead, "power is infinitely expandable, like the concentric rings emanating from a pebble dropped in a lake" (Kshensky and Muth, 1991, p. 3)

The concepts of trust and influence were also addressed by Kshensky and Muth (1991). They identified a relationship in which both principal and teacher are empowered through mutual trust and mutual influence. Thus, greater teacher participation need not erode a principal's ability to manage school events, but enhance it. Surely, a principal can use power to

increase staff ownership of and involvement in school programs and decisions. This seems to be an important aspect of shared decision-making in the school context. Decisions would be more readily accepted in schools by stakeholders if every stakeholder had a voice in the decisions that affected them directly. Furthermore, Liontos (1993), citing Bredeson (1989), affirms that "...the concept of shared decision-making allows teachers greater responsibility in their professional work life and job satisfaction" (p. 14). Lieberman (1988) concurs, if there is to be a community of leaders in the school, teachers must have the opportunities to take on responsibilities, have more decision-making power, and become more accountability for results.

Blase et al (1995) have identified three recurrent themes that develop when principals orient themselves toward a more democratic leadership: "trust in teachers' motives; the ability to listen and communicate more openly; and the willingness to risk letting go of their traditional veto power." (p. 11). Thus, by maintaining the focus of the schooling system

> principals are strongly oriented toward improving teaching and learning and supporting teachers and, as a result, make things better for children. A key element in their effectiveness is the child-centered and instructionally oriented 'end in view' that underlies their leadership perspective. They are motivated to find and support the best practices for children, and they genuinely believe that teachers can and should be trusted to serve those interests. They are committed to opening up a student-centered dialogue with teachers and to trusting that authentic efforts on their part to listen to all teachers will yield better decisions. (Blase et al, 1993, p. 11)

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework (figure 2) has been developed from this review of the literature to show the relationships between delegated, shared, and principal-made decisions which are either generic or unique. This conceptual framework is delimited to decisions that the principal must deal with at the school level. Because the principal cannot be expected to make the plethora of decisions that arise on the playground, in the classrooms, and in the staffrooms, we must make the assumption that these decisions will be made by the teachers, assistant principals, and other stakeholders. It is expected that these individuals have the necessary training and experience which would enable them to make decisions that would reflect the vision and mission of the school and the philosophy by which the school operates. Thus, decisions will be further broken down into primary decisions and secondary decisions. Primary decisions are decisions with which the principal is involved. Conversely, secondary decisions are decisions of which the principal may or may not have been made aware. Secondary decisions are not included in this conceptual framework.

As Drucker has observed, decisions can be categorized into two basic categories: generic and unique decisions. As the arrows on figure 2 demonstrate, once the decision comes to the attention of the principal, he or she must determine the most effective way of dealing with it. The

principal, based on his or her experiences and influences and the contextual variables, will decide whether to delegate the decision, share the decision, or deal with the decision unilaterally. With delegated or shared decisions, the principal may simply monitor or ask to be kept informed about developments on the decision made by an individual or a group or may be a part of the decision-making process.

The Subdivision of Drucker's (1966)
Concepts of Generic and Unique Decisions

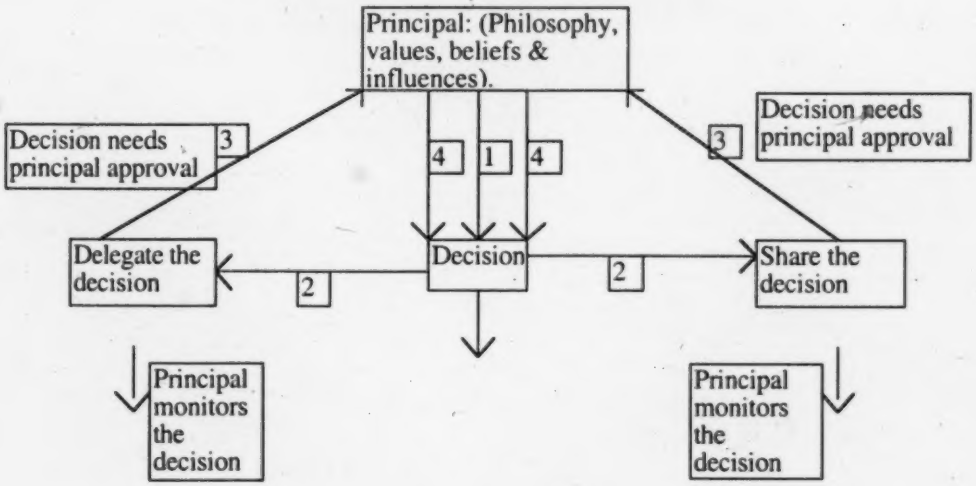

Figure 2. Decision-Making Model

Summary

Under school-based decision-making the administrative and managerial responsibilities of each school are passed on to the individual schools. The principal is empowered to make decisions that he or she has had no experience to make in the past. The principal must decide how he or

she will deal with these new issues. The literature provides a plethora of articles on shared decision-making, discussing what is it, how it is used, advantages and disadvantages of it, and how to involve the stakeholders. It also contains information on varying leadership styles, models for sharing decisions, and aspects of delegation. However, it is remiss in providing descriptions of *how* principals decide to share decisions, delegate decisions, or deal with decisions unilaterally.

CHAPTER THREE

Method

This section includes discussions of the (a) research design, (b) participants, (c) data collection procedures, (d) data analysis procedures, (e) trustworthiness of the data analysis, (f) the significance of the study, (g) limitations and delimitations of the study, and (h) description of the participants.

Research Design

This research study was a qualitative study, employing elements of interpretivistic and naturalistic approaches to research.

Six participants from a Northern Alberta School district were interviewed to explore the decision-making processes at the administrative level. This study includes a thick description of (a) the background of each principal, (b) how they ascertain whether to exercise their decision-making power, delegate their decision-making power, or share their decision-making power, and (c) how the principals deal with generic and unique decisions.

The principals were each sent a letter informing them of (a) the purpose of the study, (b) the nature of the study, (c) the data collection techniques, (d) and the follow-up procedures. Moreover, to maintain high ethical standards (a) confidentiality was assured, (b) each participant was informed of the right to opt out at anytime during the research, and (c)

interpretations of the data were shown to each participant to ensure accuracy.

Participants

The participants were selected from the Caribou School District (pseudonym) because of the proximity to the researcher. The selection of the participants was accomplished through purposeful sampling. The researcher asked an executive member of the central office in the district to identify ten successful principals.

Data Collection

The identified principals were contacted by telephone, informed of the purpose of the study and the research procedure, and invited to participate in the study. The principals who agreed to be participants were sent an introductory letter (see appendix B).

The data were collected through a semi-structured interview (see appendix A). The interview schedule was developed from the sub-questions identified in part one of this thesis.

Each interview took place at the participants' schools and lasted approximately one hour in duration. Each interview was performed on an individual basis. Each interview was recorded using an audio recorder.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews were analyzed and coded using both deductive and inductive approaches. Initial themes were derived from the transcripts in a deductive manner. Some of these themes were identified from the review of the literature. Subsequently the remaining data were analyzed inductively. Marginal notes and highlighting in the text were used with both approaches.

Further themes were developed upon closer analysis of the data. These themes were then organized in a suitable manner upon which to establish a structure necessary to present them.

Trustworthiness of the Data

During the data analysis, member checks were performed. The transcriptions of the interviews were given to each principal for confirmation. An audit trail of each interview transcription was performed. A pilot study was conducted to ensure the reliability of the interview schedule and to determine whether themes could be drawn inductively. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher transcribed the interviews personally.

Possible categories and themes were discussed with the researcher's advisor and other graduate students.

Limitations

Because of the purposive selection process of the participants interviewed, the transferability of the findings were limited. However, through the thick descriptions the background of each participant, the reader will be able to ascertain to what extent the findings can be transferred to other specific contexts.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to six principals in the Caribou School District for three reasons. First, because of financial constraints, the participants must be within commuting distance. Second, time constraints posed another obstacle to enlarging the sample. Third, the participants had to be accessible to the researcher.

Description of the Participants

Participant one - Ryan. Ryan (pseudonym), the principal of Bratten school (pseudonym), had attended university in the area of industrial vocational education. Following a few years of teaching, he completed his Masters in industrial vocational education. He has been in the field of education for 22 years.

Ryan, a very experienced administrator, has been in administration with this district since 1984. In administration he has been a vice principal at three different schools and worked as CTS coordinator out of District Office. He is in his first year at Bratten School.

Bratten School has a student population of just under 300 students. Including himself, there are approximately 20 staff members. The school is located in a middle class neighbourhood.

Ryan's decision-making has been influenced by a number of people whom he calls his "board of directors." First, his mother, "a kind and understanding person who wanted facts and figures and clarification before things were done." Second, his grandfather, said that "things need to be put in perspective." He also stated that "one should never cast the first stone." Third, the first principal whom he worked with said to him

> never take that first step until you know that the ground that you are standing on is solid. However, if you are going to take that first step and be a risk taker makes sure that the risks aren't so great that you are going to lose more than you gain.

These three people have helped to influence Ryan's decision-making, and he credits them with making him a very conscientious decision maker.

Participant two - Ellie. Ellie (pseudonym), the principal of Thompson School (pseudonym), has experienced many careers while she was working for her first two degrees. After obtaining her first degree, BA, she completed her BEd Degree in secondary education. She has had a wide variety of teaching experiences. She completed her after degree diploma in elementary education in 1990. She was vice-principal for two years before receiving her current position, principal of Thompson School.

Thompson School has about 300 students and approximately 20 staff members. The school is located in an upper middle class neighbourhood. The students, however, come from a mixture of upper and lower class families.

Her primary influence in decision-making was her father. He taught her in both a personal and professional sense to "do unto others as you would have done unto yourself."

Participant three - Keith. Keith (pseudonym) is the principal of Craigmont School (pseudonym). He began his education career in this district. He is currently in his 26th year. He started teaching as a math teacher, with a BEd from Saskatchewan. He began teaching in a Junior High School, served as the vice-principal of another school, and finally was appointed to his current position as principal of Craigmont School. He is presently in his second year as principal at this school. Keith was granted an MEd degree from the University of Alberta in educational administration.

Craigmont School is a large school with approximately 700 students. The school also has about 40 staff members.

Keith suggested that his greatest influence on how he makes decisions has been his wife. She has spent a number of years in human resources areas; she has taken a number of courses in dealing with people; and she has shared some of that information with Keith. Other influences included

school administrators with whom he had worked. His involvement with the Alberta Teachers Association (ATA) and with administrative councils have given him experience at making decisions at different levels.

Participant four - Mark. Mark (pseudonym) is the principal of Garden Heights School (pseudonym). He has been in the field of education for the past 35 years. Of those 35 years, he has served as an administrator for 33 years. He has worked in many different types of schools.

Mark completed his BEd degree. He took an off-campus program to get an administrative certificate and completed his MEd degree in educational administration.

Garden Heights School has about 400 students and approximately 40 staff members. It has a great range of socioeconomic families.

Mark stated that there were many people who have influenced his decision-making. He had read many of the administrative articles in the 1970s and 1980s as a graduate student. Other influences include administrators with whom he has worked.

Participant five - Betty. Betty (pseudonym), the principal of Tory School (pseudonym), started teaching when she was 17 years old, after attending teachers college for one year. She has been in education for 39 years. Because she started teaching at the age of 17, she had to get the Minister of Education's approval to be able to teach in a normal school. She completed her BEd degree in 1976. By that time she was already a

principal. She completed her diploma in educational administration in 1984.

Tory School has approximately 40 staff members and about 400 students. The preponderance of the students are middle class, with a few who she describes as being at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale.

One of Betty's greatest influences in her decision-making was a former teacher. Betty loved the way her teacher made decisions. According to Betty,

> the decisions that she made always seemed appropriate for children and always seemed appropriate for me and my playmates. ... as I look back, I kind of modeled everything that I did on that particular teacher, because I thought she did so well and was so just and so fair.

Participant six - Jack. Jack (pseudonym), the principal of Westmount School (pseudonym), has had a variety of experiences as a teacher, guidance counselor, vice-principal, principal, deputy superintendent, superintendent, and a member of the Department of Education for the provincial government. Jack began his academic career with a three year undergraduate degree in science, specializing in math and psychology. He went on to complete a BEd, specializing in guidance counseling and physical education. Afterwards, he completed his MEd at the U of A in 1978.

Westmount school is large school with over 700 students and over 40 staff members. Currently the students of Westmount school come from a

variety of backgrounds, including upper class, middle class, and lower class.

Jack identified three major influences in his decision-making practice. The first was a professor at the University of Alberta. The professor was influential in getting Jack's attitude and mind set to accept change, that it is a fact of life and people have to learn to deal with it.

The second influential person was a principal with whom he worked. He was a strong believer in involving people in decisions.

The third influence was a fellow who was an advocate of delegation.

These three people were quite influential in Jack's decision-making practice.

Summary

In this section, the method employed in the study was discussed. The research design, participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures were discussed. In addition, the trustworthiness of the data analysis, and the limitations and delimitations of the study were also addressed. The final section of this chapter included a thick description of the participants in the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The purpose of chapter four is to present the findings obtained from the interviews. This chapter includes a discussion of the findings and emergent themes. Deductive analysis indicated that the contextual variables concerning each issue were found to be important considerations of the principal in making decisions. The contextual variables are described as the factors of an issue which describe the context and affect how the decision will be managed.

After considering the contextual variables, the principals would select a strategy for decision-making. Three strategy-selection processes have been identified. They include (a) principal-made decision-making, (b) shared decision-making, and (c) delegated decision-making. Within the second category, shared decision-making, a number of sub-themes emerged. The sub-themes include (a) input and involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process, (b) the principals' description of a consensus, and (c) the ownership of decisions. In addition to the three strategies mentioned previously, generic and unique decision-making was found to be a component of principals' decision-making practice.

Finally, findings emerging from the inductive analysis were categorized under a number of headings from which themes were derived. These categories included: (a) the *guessperience* of the principal, (b) the

varying of the leadership styles of the principal; (c) the empowerment of subordinates; (d) the trust and confidence the principal places in the staff; and (e) the ultimate authority of the principal.

Deductive Analysis

How do you define decision-making?

Definitions of Decision-Making

"Decision-making becomes a process: when you're involving experience; where you're involving personal preferences; and where you're involving expectations that come with the position around the philosophies of the educational facility that we are operating."

Keith

When the participants were asked to define the term "decision-making," a common theme that developed among the definitions of decision-making was that it was a method or process. Some of the participants looked at decision-making in terms of problem solving or working through an issue. Betty described decision-making as "a method of solving a problem that presents itself."

Others looked at decision-making as making a change. Keith, for instance, suggested that decision-making is the process of bringing about a change. He explained that

> decision-making becomes a process: when you're involving experience; when you're involving personal preferences; and when you're involving expectations that come with the position around the philosophies of the educational facility that we are operating.

Jack looked at decision-making as a process of collecting data. This data collection process consisted of extracting input from the stakeholders through surveys, discussions, or attitudes, searching through school policies or district policies, and drawing on the experience of other administrators. Jack added that "it [decision-making] is really a process of gathering information, arriving at a decision point, and then dealing with any of the consequences of making the decision."

This discussion of the definitions of decision-making is necessary to see the perspectives of the participants. It is also necessary to look at what principals consider when making decisions.

What do you consider when you make a decision?

The Contextual Variables of the Decision-Making Process

"What is it going to do for the students? How does it benefit the child? That's basically the decision that I'm involved in most of the time. As far as I'm concerned, education is for the child, of the child, and by the child."

Betty

The contextual variables are aspects of the decision-making process that administrators contemplate before making a decision. Two general categories of contextual variables emerged from the interviews. The first includes the people in the organization: the students, the organization, the staff, and the community. The second category includes factors of the decision-making process itself: the importance of the decision, urgency of

the decision, time considerations, safety issues, idiosyncratic behavior of the principals, and the values and beliefs of the principals.

In the first category of contextual variables, the participants discussed the people in the organization they consider before making a decision. The unanimous response to the question, "What is the driving force behind your decision-making practice?" was the *students*. In Ryan's decision making practice, the most important consideration is the students of Bratten School. He stated that when the students are not the focus of the decision, you end up trying to appease one or more individuals or groups rather than focusing on the main purpose of schools which, according to Ryan, "is to ensure that the students are successful, productive citizens with the skills, knowledge and attitudes they need when they leave this school."

Respecting the view of Ryan, all of the respondents appeared to agree: Betty, for instance, noted

> What is it going to do for the students? How does it benefit the child? That's basically the decision that I'm involved in most of the time. As far as I'm concerned, education is for the child, of the child, by the child. Whatever decision I make it has to have a positive effect on the child.

Similarly, Jack stated that one of the major themes that drives everything he does is the question: "What's in it for students?" He explained that everything must be in the best interests of the students. According to Jack, his philosophy of education was that "we are here for the kids and whenever I make a decision, that's the first question that jumps into my

mind: Is this in the best interest of kids?" Jack summarized his experiences as follows:

> The first year I started teaching, I asked myself three basic questions: 1. What am I going to do with my students today? 2. What's it good for? 3. How do I know? I made that up before I started my first teaching job. I consider myself a student-centered administrator and teacher and that is critical in my decision-making. When it comes down to a choice between a benefit for students or a benefit for another party whether that's a parent, staff or whatever, I tend to come down on the side of students.

Thus, the students were apparently the major focus of the decision-making of administrators.

Second, the impact of the decision on *the organization* was found to be important to the participants. Each participant stated that after the needs of the students are taken under consideration they have to ascertain how the decision is going to affect the entire institution. When discussing what considerations concerning the organization are important, the participants identified factors such as long term and short term ramifications, costs, and whether the decision is on-going. Ellie concurred with Mark who expressed his opinion in this way:

> I think of the long term ramifications on the school. Is the decision on-going? Is the decision short term? Is this a decision which is going to affect a functional area of the school? Of course, I consider the money, are there dollars involved?

Finally, the participants identified the *staff and other stakeholders* as important variables in the decision-making process. The principals interviewed suggested that the involvement of stakeholders was seen as an

essential component of decision-making at the school level. This involvement include people whom the change is going to affect. According to Keith, "What I try to do is involve the people who are going to be impacted as much as possible." Betty concurred and added her perspective in this way:

> when a change is going to be coming about, I believe that anyone who is going to be affected needs to be involved in the decision-making. ...Otherwise, it's never going to work. You need to have a happy working environment. They work as a family, they cooperate with each other, they take over for each other, and it's because they are involved in the decision-making.

The second category of contextual variables includes the factors of the process of decision-making itself. The *importance* of the decision was suggested by the participants to be an essential aspect of the decision-making process. Ellie contemplated the importance of the decision before deciding whether it is going to be solely her decision or whether she will share or delegate the decision. The other participants concurred with Ellie who maintained that "Some things are minor. If it doesn't really matter to other people, then I'll make a decision."

In the decision-making process, the *urgency* of the decision was another consideration. When the need is urgent, some participants suggested that they will make their decisions fairly quickly, provided the information was gathered from as many sources as possible. For example, the period of time that Ryan mulled over an issue really depended on the

urgency of it and whether it fit into policy and procedures that are placed at the school level in the school handbook, teacher handbook, and so forth.

Time considerations were other factors of the decision-making process. Because the principal does not have enough time to deal with every decision unilaterally, at times he or she may share or delegate decisions. The participants agreed with Keith who stated that there is the time element as well. He maintained that he has to recognize the fact that he cannot do everything.

The third factor of the decision-making process was *safety*. Ellie discussed a safety issue that occurred at her school:

> They were going to put a strip mall here. ...They [the contractors] came to build it and dug a hole. But community pressure came on and they backed off, but they left the hole there. When it rained it fill with water, so we had this lake beside us. Kids were falling in. Safety became an priority, so I called the city, the contractors, and my ombudsman. It was a priority, so I just made a decision.

Further, Ellie maintained that safety also refers to emotional safety. Bullying issues, for example, are important considerations for her and her staff.

Another factor was that the *idiosyncratic behavior* of each principal. For example, Jack considered the information gathering stage of the decision-making process to be an important consideration. He discussed the various methods of data collection that he implemented which assist him in making decisions. According to Jack,

> The information gathering, data gathering, all of the baseline kinds of data are really important to me. I seldom make decisions unless I have either experience with a situation involving decisions with other parties or ensuring that I've gathered the information through some process, whether it's meeting with people, seeing it on paper, or getting it from different sources.

Also, the *values and beliefs* of the decision-makers in regards to the decision-making process were important factors. Values and beliefs appeared to reflect the philosophy of the principals in relation to how and why they made certain decisions. Keith described his values and beliefs about the decision-making process as follows:

> First, I believe that every person can learn beyond the level that they are at. Secondly, education is a process and not an event. It takes time and we're in the business for the long term. Every person has a right to get the best education that they can. Every person has the right to make a decision about how they are going to do that.

Jack looks at values and beliefs in a different, but equally valuable manner. He voiced his opinions in this way,

> I'm proactive, set goals, put first things first, set priorities and goals, think win-win and all those other principles of effectiveness. Those underlie my philosophy as well as student-centeredness. I also firmly believe that we are here to serve our clients, namely: students and parents. As a result I have a very customer oriented approach to doing my work here at school and trying to dispel this closed shop attitude that you get in some schools.

After the principals considered the contextual variables that influence a decision, a strategy for dealing with the decision needs to be selected. The three strategies include principal-made decisions, shared decisions, and delegated decisions.

How and why do you make decisions unilaterally?

Principal-Made Decisions

"Principals are decision-making machines."

Jack

"Most staff need to understand and do understand that there are times when the principal just has to call the shot and make the decision."

Jack

Throughout a typical day of a principal, he or she makes decisions in isolation. Principal-made decisions are those decisions that the principal makes without seeking agreement from the stakeholders. Opinions may be sought, but in these cases ultimately the principal is going to make the decision unilaterally. Jack suggested that "principals are decision-making machines." He maintained that he constantly makes decisions. The decisions that he was involved in range from being small to having major impacts. According to Jack, "whether it is suspending a kid, making a call in terms of a three day out of school suspension or a week of detentions. We are constantly doing that. That's almost the entire role."

Principal-made decisions include decisions that principals make unilaterally, as well as making the decision to share or delegate a decision. Keith explained that the decisions he makes about whether to exercise his own decision-making power, share it, or delegate it is based on experience. According to Keith,

> In some cases it is based on experience. I or the administrative team will make some decisions because some people have or told us in the past that they don't necessarily want to be involved in that kind of decision. Based on experience, I ran into situations where I've been told by individuals that they should have been a part of the decision-making process. From those experiences we try to come up with the best guess about whether people would want to be involved in a particular decision or not. In some cases you give people information and based on their reaction to the information it may lead to a decision needing to be made.

The responses of the principals to the question about principal-made decisions suggested two foci: (a) why and how principals make decisions unilaterally; and (b) what decisions they make on their own.

When asked why and how they make a decision on their own, there were a number of similar responses. They identified such decisions as (a) decisions incumbent on their role as principal, (b) decisions that are confidential, (c) decisions that need to be made expediently, (d) decisions that are based on the experience of the administrator, (e) decisions to involve others, (f) decisions that appear to be unrelated to the interests of others, and (g) decisions that are urgent.

Jack presented his view on principal-made decisions accordingly:

> Some things are clearly spelled out in the School Act in terms of the responsibility for the principal. Most staff need to understand that and do understand that there are times when the principal just has to call the shots and make the decision. ... there are many decisions that I make simply because of time constraints. There are some decisions that I have to make because they are invested in the authority of my decision. There are some decisions that I have make because of confidentiality issues.

Similarly, Keith suggested that, "The issue would come to me and I'll think 'Who will this affect? Should others be involved? If I make the decision who needs to know about it?'" Thus, principal-made decisions included deciding whether to deal with the issue unilaterally, to share it, or to delegate it. Keith maintained that

> A lot of the decisions are made on the basis of who needs to make them. What I often do is pass the request for information or decisions on to the people who have been given the authority to make the decisions. I don't try to be the expert on everything in the school. I also want to ensure that there are some other people here who gain some experience.

These decisions, according to the participants, are related to the principals' *experience* and their *philosophy of education*.

Mark concurred with Keith's analysis, but added that he makes decisions that have to be made. Also, Mark stated that nobody else wants to be involved with these types of decisions, but they are still decisions that have to get done. Mark maintained that the staff and other stakeholders would rather not be bothered with many of these decisions. According to Mark, "teachers, unless they are heading towards administration, often don't want to be involved in decision-making that doesn't affect them."

Similarly, Betty shared Ellie's view about unilateral decisions. According to Ellie, "Some things are minor. If it doesn't really matter to other people then those are the things where I'll make a decision." She also stated her opinion about principal-made decisions in this way:

> It doesn't make any difference. They wouldn't know the answer any better than I would. So I feel that I'm quite prepared to make that decision. Also, I'll make the decision because it is necessary. It's necessary for the school to function ... well. So by getting others involved in decisions that do not affect them is a waste of their time and it's a waste of their skills.

Jack seemed to agree with Ellie and indicated that *he makes decisions so others do not have to be involved in the process*. In some cases he made the decisions because he was the most responsible person (MRP) for his particular school. He needed to take the responsibility that went with the decision. Thus, giving one's opinion may not have much bearing on the outcome of the decision and may be just wasting time.

Another factor of principal-made decisions that emerged was that the participants suggested that when they make decisions, they would be able to consider *the best interests of the students*. For instance, Ryan commented that he is ultimately responsible as to whether "the students are receiving the best quality education that they can get, and if they are receiving it from staff that are qualified to do that." If he had to make a decision unilaterally, it was always focused on the students. Similarly, Betty stated that "if I feel it's going to enhance a student's life, I'll make the decision on my own and say, 'Yes, we'll go for it. We'll get involved.'"

Occasionally principal-made decisions did not need to be dealt with in an urgent manner. Unless a decision needed to be made *urgently*, such as a student who is having difficulty or has got into trouble, Ryan suggested

that he would take his time. For example, for decisions such as reconfiguring the building or reallocating classroom space, he stated that "I would take a fair amount of time and mull over them." He would also try to look at the past history of the school to see why things have been done and why they have put in practice at this school. However, Ryan maintained that when you are dealing with more urgent matters such as a student who is having difficulty or is in trouble, he will make the decision fairly quickly based on information gathered from as many sources as possible. Ryan stated that "the period of time that I mull over things really depends on the urgency of it and whether it fits into policy and procedures that are placed at the school level in the school handbook, teacher handbook and so forth."

Also, *expediency* seems to be another reason for principal-made decisions. Ellie, Mark, and Keith suggested that there were many times when a decision had to be made, but there was not enough time to seek opinions. Thus, some decisions can be made quicker if the principal does not seek opinions. Also, Jack stated, "There are some decisions for matters of efficiency and expediency I make on my own."

How principals collected the data necessary to make a decision was another important factor in principal-made decisions. According to Keith, "The larger the decision, the more data I collect." In situations such as these, the principals' data collection method may include seeking opinions and information from other stakeholders. They are still being involved in

the decision-making process; however, the principal is collecting information in order to make the best decision possible unilaterally.

What decisions do you make unilaterally?

The examples of principal-made decisions that emerged from the interviews were similar among the participants. These decisions that the respondents made unilaterally throughout the year generally pertained to issues that involve discipline, budget allocations, staff, students, general operating procedures for the staff and students, the School Act (in terms of attendance and academic expectations associated with that), and the collective agreement.

Keith provided an example of a decision that could come up on the spur of the moment such as a fire in the school. That kind of decision would be based on experience, although there could be some other natural disaster that could happen where they do not have any experience.

Additional tasks that Ellie would deal with unilaterally included creating the timetable, establishing bell times, and determining grade configurations. Her preference would have been to have the teachers' input, but if they were not around, she would have to do it alone. With the budget, Ellie explained that "you get this money, you ask for the input, but in the end you have to make a call on it yourself." She insisted that the principal must ensure there was enough money for things that you think will occur and which cannot be anticipated.

Keith discussed the *management* aspects of principal-made decisions. He related decision-making to the management of the educational process whether it's the facility, program, or personnel. He suggested that management deals with most of what he does. Also, he maintained that the principal as "educational leader" does not exist to any great extent anymore. He stated that the philosophy of the school, district, and principal is important in terms keeping the overall vision in mind.

Jack explained how principal-made decisions were related to his organizational style. For example, Jack made decisions on how he will plan the week. His weekly plan included the major events he will be taking part in, such as pre-school opening decisions. Also, he prepared for the evening workshop in August, and what he was going to do to help the support staff when they arrive at Westmount School. Because they arrived at the school two weeks in advance, a plan has to be created for them. Further, he sent notices to teaching staff, telling them when they have to show up for the first day, when the staff meetings will take place, and so forth. He needed to prepare for many pre-opening meetings with students and parents, as well as dealing with the registration of students who had been expelled last year and are asking if they can return.

On a daily basis Jack dealt with decisions that involve vandalism and state-of-the-building checks. He walked around the school first thing in the morning checking for any vandalism and checking on the students. He also

had daily interactions with the staff. Jack suggested that when the staff arrive they always ask questions. He also had to check his e-mail and inbasket. He needed to deal with numerous phone calls from businesses, external agencies, other schools, parents, and district office personnel. He has interactions with the counselors and deals with student discipline. He deals with budget decisions on a daily basis and makes spending decisions. In addition, he planned and prepared for meetings. He spent approximately 60% of his time outside of his office, either around the school or in the classrooms, simply because interaction with the students and visibility is so important to the operation of a school.

The next two strategy selection processes include: shared decision-making and delegated decision-making.

What is the difference between shared and delegated decision-making?

Shared Versus Delegated Decision-Making

Most of the participants had difficulty in distinguishing between *shared* decision-making and *delegated* decision-making. Betty suggested that whether you are going to share a decision or delegate a decision, you have to know your staff members. According to Betty,

> you learn what skills people have by talking with them informally ... in the staffroom or over lunch. You can pick up skills that people have and you can utilize them. You learn these things when you are older, because you know what you are looking for.

Betty identified a difference between shared decision-making and delegation. In reference to shared decision-making, she suggested the following:

> I will have people work on developing actions for things that you need a lot of discussion on, you need a lot of people involved, you need a lot of different ideas, not just one person's ideas. You have to have groups get involved, because they are all going to have to carry out the actions.

Thus, Betty, believed it important to share decisions that are going to affect others. Basically, if they are going to be affected by the decision, they ought to be involved.

Delegation, on the other hand, was slightly different in Betty's opinion. She suggested that she delegates projects or tasks. One such task was the integration of technology into the core subjects. She affirmed that eventually everyone will be affected by it. However, until they are ready to integrate the technology, a plan has to be devised. That plan would be delegated to one person. According to Betty:

> too many fingers in the pie spoils it. So I delegate that kind of work to one person, who I know is very good at it. The person who does it comes back to the whole group, reviews it with the whole group and they say whether it sounds good or not or can be changed or revised.

Ellie simply stated that with delegation:

> I tell you to go and do it, then it's yours. If you come back to me and say this is what I think, what do you think, then it's a shared decision. But if I say you go and do this and whatever you come up with I'm OK with. That's delegation.

Jack concurred and suggested that shared decision-making is political. He, like Betty, felt it was important to share a decision when you know the decision is going to affect a lot of different parties. He insisted that:

> If you share the decision with the various stakeholders in that particular decision there is less possibility of negative fallout from the decisions, there is more buy in, there is more possibility that the decision made is going to be accepted or implemented. That moves into the political realm of decision-making.

However, he added that there are policies that stated that you must have committees set up. Those committees include school councils, student council and so forth.

Keith distinguished shared decision-making from delegation by describing his involvement in the decision. He stated that with delegation he would be involved with the decision at the beginning to pass it along. He may also be involved at a later time; however, with shared decision-making, in most cases he would be involved directly in the decision-making.

Mark differentiated between shared decision-making and delegated decision-making in a slightly different way. He suggested that

> delegation probably occurs when I've got a good feeling for where the decision will wind up, ... how it will affect people, and I've got a good feel for someone who would enjoy or like making a decision in that area. For example, we have to do a community clean-up. I know that I have a person on staff who likes to play with environmental issues. So I simply asked her if she'd like to take it on. She just grabbed it and ran with it.

Shared decision-making, according to Mark, simply referred to the involvement of a number of people to bring a decision together.

In this section the perceived similarities and differences between shared decision-making and delegated decision-making were discussed. More attention on the second strategy selection process, shared decision-making, will be dealt with in the following section.

Why and how do you share decisions?

Shared Decision-Making

"I've recognized the power of group decisions... how to get them [stakeholders] involved in wanting to make decisions that will have an impact upon what we do."

Keith

Sharing decisions with others was the second strategy-selection process. Keith stated that through the development of decision-making in schools, more people have become a part of decision-making processes. School administrators rely on other groups of stakeholders much more than was once the case. This increasing reliance by principals in including others in the decision-making process was emphasized in the responses of the participants to the question: **Why and how do principals decide to share decisions?**

The analysis of the responses to the question generated three general themes: (a) the input and involvement of stakeholders, (b) the principals'

description of a consensus, and (c) the ownership of the decisions. Some examples of shared decisions are also discussed.

The Input And Involvement Of Stakeholders in the Decision-Making Process

Sharing decisions is a way of ensuring that the staff, students, parents, school councils, and other stakeholders feel that their input is valued. The participants respected the view of Jack, who noted that if other people are going to be affected by the decision, they have to be involved in the process. Ryan suggested that, "input drives the decision."

Betty concurred and added that she does not believe that people like to have things imposed upon them. According to Betty, "If I have to live with it, I want to be a part of the decision-making process." Moreover, Betty indicated that does not mean that the decision made is the one the majority wants. She suggested that,

> Sometimes you get the other kind of response. However, at least you were part of the decision-making. You had the opportunity to ask the questions that you wanted. Usually, though, I find shared decision-making to be the most productive way to solve an issue.

In a similar vein, Mark suggested that, "If it's a decision I think has to be made, I'll try to deal with everyone that is going to be affected by it. That's not always possible, but it is a starting point." Keith agreed, and added that he will try to involve anyone who the decision affects, particularly those who have the expertise and experience with respect to the

issue. He stated that occasionally that might include the staff, parents, or students. Keith preferred to involve those who "have a better handle on the big picture. Those who have enough information to make an intelligent decision."

Jack tended to consider first whether an issue is likely to have political ramifications. If political factors are involved in the issue, then he was likely to involve stakeholders in the process. According to Jack, whether he shared a decision or not,

> will depend on what I think are possible outcomes or consequences of a decision. If they tend to be political ones then more people tend to be involved. That's one of the bases on which it becomes a shared decision.

Also, Jack will share decisions when required to do so according to policies.

Another reason for sharing decisions, according to Jack, is because it relates to leadership. Jack stated his view on sharing decisions in this way:

> When you share decisions you are also sharing a piece of the power and authority. Philosophically that's important for the leader to share some of the responsibility for making decisions. The impact of the decision is important and certainly there are times when it's important to relate shared decision-making to the democratic process. That is part of my basic principles of operating and as a leader using the democratic approach and democracy requires participation.

Ryan suggested that it is important for all stakeholders to be included in some decisions. "It is important for the students, for example, to feel that they are heard and their concerns are dealt with." Betty indicated that

the students' input was also important in some of the decision-making at Tory School. They encouraged a very active student council. According to Betty, "They ask questions and they come up with suggestions. Then they all decide whether it is useful or not."

Further, input from the parents was an essential aspect of shared decision-making. Ryan felt that if he were to involve parents in the shared decision-making at Bratten School, they ought to be made aware of the budget. Ryan was informed by one of the parents, that the information about the budget had never been shared with parents before. Ryan stressed that it was important for them to know about the budget before making any shared decisions regarding school finances and so forth. Thus, once they are aware of the school budget and other school policies and procedures of the school, he allowed them to have input into these decisions.

In another example, Ryan asked the parent group for input into the discipline policy, along with the staff, making it a shared decision. He felt that the discipline policy would be easier to build, maintain, and enforce if parents believed that they had provided direction.

Ryan suggested that he would share decisions that may have an impact on the day to day operation of the school, but would not have a drastic effect on student learning. He stated that,

> If you are focusing on the kids you got to make decisions that say this is something that's going to effect them. Teacher X wants to work 4 days a week. That's not good for kids. Teachers A and B want to use a collaborative model for teaching science, 'yes go for it,' but make sure I know what's happening within that collaborative model for teaching science with grade 2 and 3. It's going to affect kids, but it should increase the output of those two teachers because they are able to decide, set some direction, and make some decisions on their own.

The participants seemed to agree that the variety of input was important. Ellie stated that every stakeholder can always add something special and different. There are times when people say "I wouldn't have thought of that." Also, she noted that

> sometimes you feel ... so deep in it that you can't see the forest for the trees; however, when you talk to kids, parents or people in the community and you hear what they have to say. It's refreshing.

According to Ellie, "you need to see the people who are working with things everyday to talk to you. You need to see the parent perspective. You need to see the student perspective." She maintained that she likes to talk with the stakeholders, when discussing an issue that affects them.

Betty suggested that parental input is taken under consideration when making decisions that would affect the parents. For example, one year Tory School held their Christmas concert in the afternoon. However, because this affected the parents, they distributed surveys to the parents at the parent teacher interviews, asking them if they would like to continue this trend the following year. The majority of the parents said that they would prefer, in the future, that Christmas concerts be held in the

evenings. Because this issue affected the parents, they were consulted for their input on that decision. According to Betty, Thompson School used surveys or school council meeting to get ideas from the parents.

Betty commented that the only time she ran into problems with shared decision-making was when she did not share the decision-making. She added that she learned that it is much easier if you work with a group and do group decision-making on very important issues that affect the people in the group, rather than trying to impose a suggestion.

Some of the participants suggested that when they give stakeholders the opportunity to be involved in the decision, they would hope that they do so before the final decision is made. Ellie explained that,

> Generally, I like to talk with the stakeholders. If it affects you then do you want to give me your two sense worth, because if I don't know it I can't consider it and I'd rather know it up front rather than have to say 'gee, I wish I had known that. I may have made a different decision.'

Keith revealed that his decision-making has changed throughout the years. He believed the change in his decision-making is a result of his experience in administration. He disclosed that he recognizes the power of group decisions, how to empower people, and how to get people involved in wanting to make decisions that will have an impact on the school.

The involvement of the principal in shared decision-making appeared to range from simple to complex involvement. Mark suggested that the simple involvement would include initiating a discussion among other

stakeholders about an issue, determining peoples' opinions about various topics, "planting a seed" by mentioning issues or ideas for change and "letting the seed grow" among the staff until someone notices a need in a particular area. Complex involvement included total involvement in the decision-making process by controlling the direction of the discussion or facilitating group work on various issues. As Mark suggested, "... it could be the whole gamut." He tended get the staff thinking about issues before they discuss them at staff meetings.

On the other hand, Mark's involvement may simply be helping to get people on track, helping them decide what they need to focus on, "helping people formulate or put in ideas that others can work with, or making sure that people get recognition for what ideas they got." He explained that some teachers have very good ideas, but cannot articulate them into understandable terms. Therefore, part of his responsibility as an administrator in the shared decision-making process is to help those people ensure that others understand them. Mark believed that leadership has a lot to do with empowering people to do the things that need to get done, or to empower people to use the skills they possess. He noted that often teachers have skills that they do not recognize as valuable outside the classroom. Thus, Mark is able to recognize skills that some members of his staff possess, and help them develop their skills.

Jack also commented on the involvement of principals in shared decision-making. He suggested that he does not "politic" in order to arrive at his desired outcome of the process. He understood and accepted the fact that there may be a different outcome and a different decision made and he has to live with that. He suggested that "if you cannot accept these different decisions, you are going to have problems in this role as principal." Jack discussed a hypothetical example of shared decision-making:

> Sometimes you sit together with your staff and discuss whether a student should go on from grade nine to grade ten. If you make the decision to hold a student back there are consequences. These may include dealings that have to go on with parents and the kids themselves. So a shared decision is a shared decision. Everyone takes responsibility for it.

Keith postulated that different types of shared decision-making occur at Craigmont School. First, there is a situation where input is requested from an affected group and, from the subsequent input and discussion, a decision can be made by an individual or a group of individuals. Second, there is the situation where an individual or a group of individuals are given the authority to make a decision based on the philosophies of Alberta Education, the district, and the school. Finally, there is decision-making designed to seek a *consensus* as a group, making it a democratic decision. In all of those cases though there is still the underlying understanding that the decision must be based on the philosophies of the organizations. They still have one main goal in: to educate students.

How do you define a consensus?

The Principals' Description of a Consensus

Each participant at one time or another commented on the term consensus. They stated that during a shared decision-making meeting they would try to achieve a consensus. The participants had similar views on the meaning of the term consensus. Keith expressed his views in this way:

> If it comes down to a vote, a consensus means the majority. There are some issues however that because they fall into a personal nature 50% +1 isn't sufficient grounds to make that change. You may want to look for something closer to unanimity.

Betty and Jack concurred that a consensus meant a majority. However, Jack made it clear that when he is dealing with a group of stakeholders involved in shared decision-making, he looked for a consensus, not unanimity. According to Jack:

> A consensus is a voiced opinion by the majority of the people either for or against a particular issue or decision. A consensus evolves through a discussion, through the dialogue you have, through the listening to the dissenting opinions versus the ones in support of the decision. You get a feel for it through the discussions. As you summarize it, you tend to see the agreement and the consensus through either the nodding of the heads or people saying 'yes.' You can feel the consensus. More specifically, it can actually be materialized in the form of a vote. If you get majority, more than fifty percent, going one way then that's a consensus.

Jack does not believe that everyone has to agree with the decision, but that method fits with the democratic process.

If a consensus were achieved, the participants felt that stakeholders would have a sense of ownership of the decision.

The Ownership of Decisions

Another important element of the shared decision-making process that emerged from the interviews is the extent to which the stakeholders accept the decision as theirs. It appeared necessary for the stakeholders to have ownership over the decisions made which affect them. For the staff to tackle the issue and try to solve it or make the change, they have to "buy-in" or own the decision. In that way the staff, by combining efforts, will try to make the decision work. Keith stated that the more input a person has in a decision the better he or she is able to "buy into" the decision and have some reason to want it to be successful.

According to Ellie, when people are involved in the decision, everyone has some ownership of it. Ellie stated that "they said this and they agreed to do this." She thinks the best changes that happen in schools occur when everyone is in agreement. She affirmed that "when you work with the school council and you all sit down and come to a shared vision for things, it certainly is 'buy in.'"

Mark suggested that it does not matter whether you are working with staff, students, parents, or others. The stakeholders ought to have a sense of ownership in the decision-making process if they are to "buy-in" to the decision. Keith agreed and added that "A unanimous decision is always preferable. It will help the 'buy in' of course." During a shared decision-

making meeting, Keith would always strive for unanimity among the participants.

At times, a principal may "bounce" ideas off the staff at a staff meeting or at an informal gathering. For Mark, involving anyone who wants to be involved in the decision was an important aspect of shared decision-making. He wanted the staff to take ownership of decisions. Therefore, he tried to involve anybody who is willing to be involved. "If it's a one shot thing at the staff meeting, I'll just ask the staff." For example, Mark had an opportunity to bring a native dancing group to his school. At a staff meeting, he just said, "these people are available to us. Would you like to go for it? And they said, 'Yes.'" So that helped him decide to bring the dancers to the school. The rest of the preparations fell to the administration.

Mark added that the concept of ownership over decisions applies to all stakeholders. He felt that it was necessary for students to have ownership over some of the decisions that affect them. He suggested that the more ownership you can give the students, the more you can empower them to feel that they have some control over what is happening and to steer them to have ideas that are logical.

Ellie also looked at shared decision-making in terms of "stake." She discussed the stakeholders as having a personal interest in the particular decision. Her opinion was stated in this way:

> We all have a 'stake' in it; we all have responsibility for it; and we all accept what comes out of it. There would be times when we consult the community members, asking them what they felt about an issue. Sometimes you need a unique objective opinion on things, that's when we go out into the community and get viewpoints on things.

Finally, after discussing various components of decision-making, it is necessary to discuss what decisions administrators share with others.

What are some examples of shared decisions?

Examples of shared decisions

There were many similarities among the types of decisions that the principals shared with their staff members. Ryan explained that the decisions he would share would have more of an impact on other stakeholders than on himself. For example, "Supervision. I let the staff build the supervision schedule. I don't bother with that. They are the ones who are going to have to deal with it."

Jack suggested that some shared decisions might deal with policies, programs, evaluation of students or programs, management of the school, discipline issues, or communication issues and initiatives. They could also have to do with changes to any of those areas and may deal with school operations, student conduct policy, school education plan, curriculum, new initiatives, marking and reporting, and shared decision-making with the vice principals. Other shared decisions included the school newsletter, staff meetings, school council meetings, and student council meetings.

This discussion of shared decision-making leads to the third category of decision-making: delegated decision-making.

Why and how do principals decide to delegate decisions?

Delegated Decision-Making

"I have seen so many people that possessed many different skills, when I was not a principal.... So when I became a principal, I decided to take a chance... and I started delegating at my first school. I found out that the people loved to get involved and they did a wonderful job."

Betty

Delegation was the third strategy selection process for decision-making. The participants had similar reasons for delegating decisions and similar methods for involving people in the delegation process. The first was to *share the load and the decision-making*. Ellie stated that this would allow individuals "... to have a stake in what is going on." She added that "I'd like to think that when we delegate, we are sharing the responsibility."

The second reason for delegating was a *time management* issue. Jack suggested that that "it is a survival strategy." He maintained that he cannot do it all unilaterally. Keith concurred with delegation being a time management issue and stated that "there is no way that one person can operate a school of this size on his or her own. Other people need to be empowered to make decisions at whatever level they are involved."

Third, it was important for individual staff members to be recognized for their *skills and talents*. The participants seemed to be able to

identify skills that exist among teachers. Some of the principals, Mark and Betty for example, felt that it was their place to help the individual teachers develop their skills by delegating decisions to them. Betty noticed through the years that many people were not utilized for the skills or talents they had. She voiced her views about delegation accordingly:

> I have seen so many people that possessed many different skills, when I was not a principal. There were so many people who had wonderful skills that were never utilized and I used to think, 'My goodness, I'm sure that that person would have loved to be involved in that.' So when I became a principal, I decided to take a chance, and I started delegating at my first school. I found out that the people loved to get involved and they did a wonderful job, and I never looked back. It was a positive experience for myself and the people. In fact, I've increased the delegation duties and they love it.

Betty, for one, tried to delegate to subordinates as often as possible. If she identified a skill or a talent that a staff member had, she gave him or her time off to work on it. She has done this with teachers, the vice principal, and even with parents, and according to Betty, it seems to work. Betty stated, "I think that people are appreciated for their skills." She was, however, aware of the individuals' skills beforehand. She stated that she would not just throw something to someone whom she knows is not going to be successful. Ellie agreed and added "recognizing expertise in others is necessary."

Fourth, through delegation, the administrator was the main actor in *building a team*. It was important to have people contribute to that team. In Jack's words, "if you started out as part of the philosophy that we are part

of a team here, that we all have to share and work together, then people accept it more readily."

The fifth reason for delegation is to *help the individual staff members themselves grow*. Keith mentioned that part of the reason why he delegates was to give people the feeling that what they do is important in the hope that they will continue to grow and reach for other things that make them successful. It was important for the staff members to learn from their experiences. Therefore, Keith suggested that "the experience comes from what responsibilities you allow these people to have. The more experienced we are the better decisions we should be able to make."

Mark wanted to give the teachers the opportunity to take on responsibilities. He explained that "when the teachers take risks and do things they have not attempted before, there is the opportunity for them to fail in their endeavor." Mark thought that by failing they are actually growing. He insisted that "People learn from their mistakes." Mark suggested that this will also show the students that they can take chances and make mistakes. Mark believed that the teachers and the students are too concerned about not succeeding. Thus, delegation may facilitate the growing and learning experiences of the teachers and students.

The final reason why the participants delegate was so that the delegate has *ownership* over the decision. As Mark stated, "I have

ownership for everything, but I want individual teachers to take ownership of decisions and responsibility for making decisions."

Within delegation, a number of themes emerged that were not anticipated by the researcher.

Inductive Themes that Emerged from the Discussion of Delegation

Throughout the interviews, emergent themes developed from deductive questions. They will be addressed in this section.

Expertise, position, and expertise. Factors such as *experience, position, and expertise* emerged as reasons for delegating to certain people. For example, Keith suggested that he would expect the vice-principal of the school to make different decisions than the secretary of the school.

Trust and Confidence. One of the fundamental aspects of delegation seemed to be the principals' needs to have or to develop *trust and confidence* in their staff. All of the participants appeared to have a lot of respect and confidence in the decision-making abilities of their staff members. Ryan suggested that delegation also provides the teacher with a means of having some personal autonomy. He added that principals have to trust their people.

Principals' involvement in delegation. Opinions involving the extent of the *principals' involvement* in the delegation process differed. Some principals stated once they delegate the decision, they stay clear of the action. For example, Betty stated that, "I am hands off and the rest of the

staff knows at the beginning of the year." Generally, Betty divided many of the responsibilities between herself and the vice-principal at the beginning of the year according to their different strengths. Then, throughout the year, the staff was aware of who would deal with what issues.

Similarly, Ellie described the following example:

> The VP [vice-principal] was trained in the lion's quest program as a teacher and an ambassador. How much sense does it make for me to go ahead a run that program? Within the parameters of the program, tell me about the program, and keep me up-to-date on the program. If we need to make decisions, come and talk to me about it. Give me the background about it. If anyone else has a stake in it, we can get together to discuss it.

Betty explained that it is important for her to communicate with the vice-principal to share the decisions that one another made each day. According to Betty,

> We meet every morning and we share everything. We're a good team. I have all my things written in my book and we go through everything. We share the days occurrences, everyday that we are here. So when she comes back tomorrow, I'll fill her in with what happened today. And she does the same with me.

This appears to be a very useful practice. If a parent wants to discuss an issue with Betty, Betty will be informed about the situation that morning by the vice-principal. Thus, either the principal or the vice-principal will be able to discuss an issue that occurred.

Do you delegate decisions to first year teachers?

Delegation to first year teachers varied among the participants. For example, Betty stated that she would not delegate to first year teachers:

> If it's a first year teacher then they are always 'buddied' with someone. And that first year teacher would never be asked to do something. The only thing I'm concerned with for first year teachers is survival and getting used to teaching which includes preparing lessons and that sort of stuff. I never put extra burdens on first year teachers.

When the first year teachers are "buddied" with an experienced teacher, they would learn how to deal with issues, but were not necessarily given the responsibility for a particular initiative. The experienced teacher would be a mentor for the first year teacher to socialize that teacher into the school culture. If the experienced person accepted a delegated responsibility, then the first year teacher could be involved.

Similarly, Mark stated that he would spend more time monitoring a first year teacher. His rationale for this was twofold. First, he would want to make sure that they are comfortable with what they are doing. Second, he would want to ensure that someone does not change the direction they are going. "Usually a first year teacher has a certain level of skill they need to work with. I try to make sure they don't run head first into parents."

Jack, on the other hand, did not necessarily delegate differently between first year and experienced teachers. According to Jack,

> I think it's really task specific in terms of how I deal with it. It is focused on the task as opposed to differentiating by age and experience. I think it's just as important to give the young teachers those opportunities and to give them responsibility and experience of doing things and being the most responsible person for various things as an experienced teacher. Sometimes it's better with younger people.

Betty appeared to be very conscientious of the skill level and experience level of the staff member before she delegated a decision. In Betty's view,

> I would never ask the vice-principal to do the timetable in the first year, because I don't know if he or she knows how. I may do the time table myself with the vice-principal. Then I can see if the vice-principal knows what to do or not. I usually ask if they want to do it themselves.

Ellie, on the other hand, believed that even though she does delegate she is responsible for the outcome of that decision. In Ellie's words,

> Perfect delegation would be that I don't even monitor the situation and whatever happened goes into effect. I don't think so. I need to know what you are thinking, how you are going to get their, and what decision you arrived at.

In terms of preparing someone for delegation, Ellie preferred to ascertain the staff member's feeling about various issues. For example,

> 'We need someone to help us purchase materials. Would you be willing to do that?' Then I'd have the person team up with someone who had some experience in that. Mentoring. We are big into mentoring with teachers this year.

Following up on a delegated decision. After delegating a decision to a subordinate, the participants seemed to feel that it was necessary to be informed about the progress of the decision. This feedback comes in two forms depending on the leadership style of the principal. First, some of the participants *monitor* the progress of the decision. That is, they occasionally asked questions to ascertain where the delegate is an a particular initiative. Second, some wanted to be *kept up-to-date* on the progress of the decision.

That is, the principals do not go out seeking the progress of the initiative, they tell the delegate to inform them about the progress on a particular decision or task.

Ryan perceived that because ultimately he is responsible for the decisions that are made at the school, if he were to delegate a decision he would monitor its progress. Ryan provided the following example:

> Purchasing the physical education equipment would be an example of a delegated decision. It affects two people that have to deal with it. All I have to do is monitor the budget side of it. In the end it will affect the kids, but it's money that is going to be spent and the needs are better known by the physical education teachers than by me. My input at the front end would be, 'you have $2500.00 to spend, you need equipment, why don't the two of you sit down and put together what you need.'

Others felt that monitoring or asking questions during the decision-making process may undermine the confidence that the principal has in his staff. Jack concurred with Ellie's idea of being kept up-to-date, but does not like the concept of monitoring. Jack's stated that monitoring the decision-making process is "looking over their shoulder." According to Jack, the staff may feel that the principal does not have much trust or confidence in their abilities, if he were to check up on them. However, some delegates may want to be monitored or coached along the way, but he does not like to do monitoring of that nature. Jack stated that one exception would be if the superintendent, or another superordinate, wanted an update on the status of a particular project or task. In that case, Jack would ask the

appropriate questions. His main concern is that his people may begin to question his confidence in them. In Jack's words, "I feel that I've given the ball to you and you run with it and keep me informed."

In contrast, Mark described his involvement in delegation as supportive. Once he has delegated a task to someone, he is prepared to let that person "go with it." According to Mark, "That doesn't mean I don't listen. That doesn't mean I don't be a sounding board." Rather, he believes that whatever direction the staff member wants to go with the decision makes sense to that particular staff member. He suggested that "It makes sense because you understand it." Mark stated that he rarely steps in and stops someone. He may steer the process, ask the delegate to be cautious or ask people to be aware of how that's going to affect colleagues or who ever, but he rarely tells them not to do it.

Similarly, Keith suggested that he rarely would tell a delegate that he or she made a bad decision because delegation helps to build confidence in the person or groups that are being given the authority to make decisions.

Mark identified one *risk of delegation*. He suggested that when you delegate, you allow for the possibility of letting a staff member surpass the principal in a particular field. According to Mark,

> As an administrator you run the risk of letting a staff member out run you considerably in knowledge and in administrative tasks of some kind in the school. That's the chance you take. There are champions out there that have higher level skills in some areas.

Mark seems to want to foster the development of these champions.

How do you prepare someone for delegation?

The principals appeared to *prepare staff for delegation* differently. Keith suggested that one way to prepare someone for delegation is to communicate the expectation that they will have the opportunity to make decisions and the belief that they have the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be able to make the decisions. Furthermore, he stated that you need to provide them with the information that they will need to be able to make the decision or to provide them with the information as to where to get further information. In a general sense, Keith seemed to point the delegates in a direction, and allow them to make their decisions.

Similarly, when delegating responsibilities to subordinates, Jack collected the data on a particular initiative. This allowed the delegate to understand the scope of the work that is involved. The delegate can then make a decision of whether to accept the responsibility or not. According to Jack, "that's important, because if you don't have 'buy-in' right from the start, then it has a totally different impact on the results." He does not want to be an administrator who simply says, "we need someone to do it, so do it."

Jack looks at delegation as being *task specific*. He stated that "if we want to end up with this who's the best person to involve." To determine whom the best person would be, he would contemplate the individuals

background, training, and experience. He would also consider political factors among staff, trying to ensure that there is an even spread of delegation, workload, and responsibilities. Because political factors affect staffs in both positive and negative ways, he needed to consider the affect the political factors will have on other people on a particular task. He would also ensure that the delegate has the people skills necessary to complete the task. Jack stated,

> It's a fairly complex process: weighing all of the different considerations prior to going to someone and saying 'would you like to get involved in this. Here's what I know about it, what do you think? This is what I think you might have to do.'

We map out an outline and possibilities, discuss the possible drawbacks, advantages, and the preferred outcome. Thus, there are many decisions that the principals make prior to actually delegating a decision.

Mark, on the one hand concurred with the process of delegation suggested by Jack, however, he delegated in a slightly different manner. He preferred to send ideas around and see who picks up on them. He gave the stakeholders the opportunity to come forth and take on an initiative. When a stakeholder came forward to accept the responsibility for an initiative, Mark stated that he provided the leadership. In this way, the stakeholders are able to work with their strengths and interests.

Does true delegation exist in your school?

Ryan, like Betty, suggested that *true delegation* exists. He described true delegation as when the authority to make a decision is transferred over to another party, and the delegate is completely responsible for the decision. If there were a decision made that he did not agree with, Ryan would not change the decision. This is because every decision that someone makes is a learning experience and if the wrong decision were made, the school as a unit would have to overcome the result and try to avoid making similar mistakes in the future.

Jack and Ellie interpreted the concept of *full responsibility of delegation* differently. Ellie considered it as being totally hands off the decision and whatever the individual or group came up with would be used. She stated that with her leadership style, she would not be completely "hands off." Jack, on the other hand, voiced his understanding of full responsibility and what his expectations of the delegated person or group accordingly:

> It means understanding that the person you are going to delegate a task to has the background qualifications, training and the ability to do it. Secondly, once you give them a responsibility, it is their responsibility including all the decisions surrounding that particular task. What I expect in return is simply they complete the task the best way they can, high standard, and I be kept informed of what is going to happen with that particular task. I know that when I assigned something to someone, I find that they touch base with me quite often in between stages.

What kinds of decisions will the principal delegate?

Examples of Delegated Decisions

Depending on the experience of the principal and the size of the school, there are various examples of decisions that the principals delegate. Ryan delegated the responsibilities for developing individualized programs to his counselor. According to Ryan:

> She works with the kids much closer in those areas than I do. Ultimately I read through that material to make sure that I know what directions are being taken before I sign. But you have to be able to trust your LAC person that the programs, what they are doing with kids, and working with the other staff members are going to be in the best interests of the kids.

Keith described other examples of delegated decisions. These included such responsibilities as preparing timetables, registering students, preparing the supervision schedule, and preparing their own lesson plans (secondary decisions).

Jack discussed some of the decisions that he delegates. He stated that he gives administrative responsibilities to the vice principals regarding student discipline, attendance, and provincial achievement tests. For matters concerning subject departments, programs of studies, and courses within department areas he delegated these either to an administrator or to a most responsible person (MRP). Special initiatives, teaching duties, and responsibilities for supervision, extra curricular activities, student progress, and attendance are also assigned to specific people.

In summary, the three strategy selection processes of decision-making were discussed. These strategy selection processes included: principal-made decision-making, shared decision-making, and delegated decision-making. However, in selecting an appropriate strategy in which to deal with the issue, the principals also consider the type of decision.

How do generic and unique decisions affect the decision-making process?

Types of Decisions

"A generic decision has more parameters. Whereas with unique decisions, you are only limited by your imagination and your pocket book. Those are the more exciting decisions. They can make a lot of difference for kids."

Ellie

In decision-making at the school level, the principal is faced with various types of decisions. The types of decisions that will be discussed in this section include generic and unique decisions. Although the participants seemed to agree about the factors of generic and unique decision-making, they did not concur about what a unique decision was. For instance, Ryan explained that because the context of the students' situations is going to be different, every time you deal with a student in the office it may be a unique situation.

At the other extreme, Keith stated that there really were not many decisions that could be classified as unique in education. They were more likely to be decisions that have been made in the past and have resurfaced,

rather than being completely unique. Keith expressed his views on unique decision-making accordingly:

> there is not too much around education and the management of a facility that is new or unique. It's a decision that has been made by someone, somewhere, at some point in education. We do a lot of things based on ... our experience and the experience of others.

Keith suggested that he would treat unique and generic decisions in a similar manner. He was more concerned with whether to involve others, who to involve, and the data collection process.

Ryan suggested that when he is confronted with a unique issue, he may turn to the experience of his colleagues for advice. He stated that

> I do at times call some of my colleagues and say 'this is where I am at and this what I think I'm going to do, what's your perception of this?' Your colleagues that have experienced much more than you have in administration are really key in making some of those unique decisions.

Occasionally, principals run into difficulties with their superordinates when decisions are not generic. For example, Caribou School District encouraged formal and informal partnerships with businesses in the community. However, at that time, there was no policy that explained with what types organizations or businesses an individual school can form a partnership. Betty, having formed an informal partnership with an organization, got into trouble with her superordinates, because they felt that the students should not be aligned with a certain type of organization. Because no policy had been established to determine what

type of organization one can establish a partnership, Betty maintained that she was not at fault. After this incident, she was told that a policy on partnerships would be developed. Therefore, unique decisions lead to generic decisions.

The method that the participants dealt with generic and unique decisions was similar. Both Jack and Keith stated that the process of dealing with unique or delegated decisions would be the same. Also, Mark suggested that his involvement in generic or unique decisions would not differ.

A difference between generic and unique decisions among the participants was that with generic decisions, much of the background information is known among the staff members. However, with unique decisions, both the principal and the staff would have to gather, collect, and analyze the data before a decision could be made. For Jack, when he delegated a unique decision much of the baseline work had to be done. He expressed his views about generic and unique decisions in this way:

> Sometimes it is helpful if it's a generic type of decision or task. For example, if it's driven by policy, it's a little simpler. Presumably the person will understand the policy or know the policy. The more unique decision or task requires a little more work. It takes a little longer to get the person up to speed on the background information in order for them to decide to take it.

An example that Jack identified involved a new student information system. Jack needed someone who had some background and expertise in

computers. Because there were not any policies governing the acquisition of new student information systems, it was a unique situation. They ended up choosing the system based on just a committee of administrators and people selecting a product. However, Jack needed an MRP, at the school, in order to continue with the actual loading of the system and doing the inservicing. Jack discussed this with one of his vice principals who has some computer background. The vice-principal said "yeah, it would be best for me to be involved." Thus, unique decisions may take more time, work, and preparation.

Another difference between generic and unique decisions is that generic decisions have more parameters. Each participant suggested that it is much easier to work within guidelines, policies, or procedures that have already been established. According to Ellie, "The decision is almost made by itself."

In contrast, Ellie felt that with unique decisions, there are more opportunities for the for the staff and others to make decisions that will have a positive impact on the students. She stated that with unique decisions, "you are only limited by your imagination and your pocket book. Those are the more exciting decisions. They can make a lot of difference for kids."

A final difference between generic and unique decisions, according to Ryan, is that unless there are unusual circumstances surrounding the

decision generic decisions tend to be made more quickly than unique decisions.

In summary, unique decisions were found to be dealt with in the same manner as generic decisions. However, the differences between unique and generic decisions would be the knowledge of the background information concerning an issue; the parameters concerning the issue; and the expediency that a decision can be made.

This concludes the discussion of the deductive themes. The focus of the discussion will now change to review the themes that emerged inductively.

Inductive Analysis

The categories that emerged through an inductive analysis of the interviews include (a) the guessperience of the principal, (b) the varying leadership styles of the principal, (c) the empowerment of ones' people, (d) the trust and confidence the principal places in his or her people, and (e) the ultimate accountability of the principal.

The *Guessperience* of the Principal

"From our experiences, we try to come up with the best guess about whether people would want to be involved in a particular decision or not."

Keith

Guessperience is a good guess based on the past experience of the decision maker. Most of the participants maintained that many of the

decisions that they make is based on past experience. They seemed to reflect upon such questions as: What worked well? What did not work? Why did it not work? Jack and Mark concurred with Keith who stated his views on making a decision based on experience as follows:

> In some cases it's based on experience. I or the administrative team will make some decisions because some people have or told us in the past that they don't necessarily want to be involved in that kind of decision. Based on experience, I ran into situations where I've been told by individuals that they should have been a part of the decision-making process. From our experiences, we try to come up with the best guess about whether people would want to be involved in a particular decision or not.

Because there is not usually an infallible solution for all decisions, the principals have to make a good guess based on their experience and/or the experience of others.

The participants seemed to agree that because of the *guessperience* of the principal, he or she is able to make decisions quickly. An inexperienced administrator may not have the *guessperience* as an experienced administrator.

Jack maintained that he seldom makes decisions unless he has either experienced a situation involving a particular decisions or ensures that he had gathered the information through some process whether it was through "meeting with people, seeing it on paper, or getting it from different sources."

The Varying Leadership Styles of the Principal

"At one point I would have wanted to have much more control over all kinds of decisions. As I've become more experienced in the process of administration, that has changed to the point of trying to involve other people."

Keith

Another common theme that emerged from the interviews was the mixture of leadership styles that each of the principal utilized. The styles utilized by each participant ranged from consultative to authoritative. Ryan described his decision-making practice as consultative and analytical. He explained that it is necessary to collect an abundance of data about the problem, assess the possible solutions, and analyze the impact the decision will have on the students.

Betty also felt it necessary to utilize a consultative leadership style, but stated the importance of mixing her styles.

> I can be authoritarian at times, but I think I'm more collaborative and democratic. I mix all my styles. I don't deal with different issues the same way. If a decision has to be made, I'll do it.

Ellie, like Betty and Ryan, also tries to be a collaborative leader. It appeared that she preferred to consult with others before making decisions. She expressed her opinion accordingly:

> I talk to as many people as I can to get their viewpoints on it. When I really feel like I'm out their alone, I just pick up the phone and talk to other administrators and say 'Look this is my situation, what do you think?'

Even though she discusses issues with people outside of her school, she ultimately accepts the responsibility for the decisions made at Thompson School and she occasionally needs to be authoritative and make the decision.

Keith stated that his decision-making style has changed over the years. He stated that at one point he would have wanted to have much more control over all kinds of decisions. As he has become more experienced in the process of administration, his decision-making style has become more collaborative. He will often make a decision about who a decision should go to for input. Keith suggested that in some cases it is a matter of correspondence when the decision comes into the school. He stated that

> I have to consider who is most impacted by the information and who would benefit most by it. A decision is simply made to who to send it to. When they get to bigger decisions, then more people have to be involved. When it comes right down to it, under school based management that they are working with now, the final decisions do rest with the principal.

Mark, utilized a more subtle leadership style. When making a decision, Mark began by collecting the data, either formally or informally, and talked to the staff to see where they are on the issue. He explained that he often "sets pieces of a decision aside," because he found his staff does not have any idea what research tells them and may be off on a tangent. According to Mark,

> I might be in one direction, but the staff may be off in another direction. I'm not opposed to even letting them help us make decisions and run that direction until they find out that this isn't necessarily going to work.

In his leadership style, Mark allowed his staff to pursue one avenue of a decision, rather than trying to direct or control the direction of the decision. He stated that, "nothing is written in stone and often we have to try it before we are satisfied it's not going to work." He found that the teachers will always say, "In my experience I think it is going to work." In these situations, he will let them make a decision against his experienced judgment, and he is prepared to support it, unless it is going to have negative ramifications on the school or staff. In Mark's words,

> If everyone champions a cause, it is likely to be successful. I'm prepared to step back and say, 'OK. These guys are probably going to make this thing work, so I'll help them go in that direction.' On the other hand, there are always people who are thinking a little differently and might go with the crowd until the see that it's not going to do what they want it to do or it is taking more energy than they want to put into it.... They start asking the right questions and as they ask the right questions then you or somebody else ... begins to feed them other kinds of information.

The leadership styles of the principal is related to the empowerment of subordinates.

The Empowerment of Ones' People

"The teachers basically have ideas. They always have ideas how to solve problems or how to make things work better. If you have a champion out there, then you have to roll with it."
Mark

Throughout the interviews, it became evident that empowerment was a major reason why the stakeholders were involved in the decision-making process, particularly with delegation. When subordinates assume leadership roles, they begin to enter a new phase of their working experience. In Keith's opinion, "the more you involve people in decision-making the more you're giving them the opportunity to become the instructional leader in their particular area." Also, Keith contended that other people need to be empowered to make decisions at whatever level they are involved.

Another aspect of empowerment, as identified by Ellie, was that the teachers do not necessarily have to begin directing teachers, but they fulfill their own roles in the school differently. For example, a first year teacher came up to Ellie and asked her if there were an event that she could organize. Ellie suggested that she take on the responsibility for organizing the winter carnival. Ellie believed that responsibility really empowered her. According to Ellie, the teacher stated "I can do this. I can affect the lives of over 300 kids." Getting involved and organizing an activity of that magnitude makes one feel that they can achieve much more than what they may have been doing in their classroom.

Mark has an interesting way of identifying champions among his staff. The term champions refers to those who find empowerment through getting involved in the decision-making process. He tended to "feed out" ideas and "drop hints." He will put an issue "on the table" that he put off

making a decision. Mark stated "I let it float around a bit, then when it starts to come back to me, I pick up on it." He follows up by sending out another "piece of information" which leads to the next step in the decision-making. According to Mark:

> the teachers basically have ideas, they always have ideas how to solve problems or how to make things work better. If you have a champion out there, then you have to roll with it. You open the doors and make sure the money is in place when those people come forward. Make sure they get to the workshop if they need some background of some kind and just step back and let them roll.

Mark maintained that it is necessary to empower people to use the skills they possess. He suggested that often teachers have skills that they do not recognize as valuable outside the classroom. As a principal, he felt that it is his role to ensure that these skills are developed or that he gives the teachers the opportunity to develop their skills.

Empowerment of subordinates seems to foster positive feelings among the staff who are willing to take on an initiative. It is also a sign that they have trust and confidence in the abilities of their staff members.

The Trust and Confidence the Principal Places in the Stakeholders

"If you are giving someone something to do, you are trusting that they are competent to do it, they will do it competently, and the result will be positive."

Ellie

Each participant commented on the importance of trust and confidence in the people of the organization. They concurred with Ellie who stated that she needed to ensure her staff members were acknowledged

for their abilities and that she trusts them and has confidence in them. According to Ellie,

> if you are giving someone something to do, you are trusting that they are competent to do it, they will do it competently, and the result will be positive. It's also an acknowledgment of a talent. That's become an important part of what we do and will continue to do at this school.

Keith tended to put more trust and confidence in his staff to make decisions rather than other stakeholders. He suggested that there are issues where he simply trusts the staff to make the decisions and he is prepared to live with what they say. He also suggested that the trust and confidence he places in people depended on the question or the issue involved.

Similarly, Ryan added "it is important to trust your people." He stated that you need to have confidence in the programs they develop, trust what they are doing with the students, and have confidence in how they work with the other staff members. He felt that one needs to have the trust and confidence that what they are doing is going to be in the best interests of the students. Ryan cautioned that if you do not have that confidence in your staff, "the school becomes nothing more than them asking for a 'yes' or a 'no.' You need to be able to trust your people."

In discussing trust and confidence in one's people, Jack reflected back to when he was a counselor at a school. He suggested that when the principal came to him for his opinion on various issues, he felt that it was a "vote of confidence" for him. He stated "I thought it was encouraging."

Even though the principal places trust and confidence in the people of the organization, all the participants maintained that they are ultimately responsible for the decisions made at their own school.

The Ultimate Accountability of the Principal

"In the end it is my responsibility, so I'll make the call. My name is on the bottom line. They say that I get the big bucks for this, so my head is on the chopping block."

Ellie

Regardless of the decisions that the principal allows others to make, each principal stated that they were ultimately responsible for the decisions that were made at their schools. Ryan suggested that he delegates and shares various responsibilities with his staff members; however, he reads through that material to make sure that he knows what directions are being taken before he signs.

Ellie concurred, with Ryan's idea of accountability of the decision resting with the principal, but added that she perceived her staff as a team. She suggested that "We are a team. In the end I know it's my name that goes on the paper. In the end it is my responsibility, so I'll make the call. My name is on the bottom line. They say that I get the big bucks for this, so my head is on the chopping block."

Jack added the concept of the principal being the most responsible person for ones particular school. Further, he maintained that he needs to take the responsibility that goes with every decision.

Summary

In summary, this chapter dealt with the themes and strategy-selection processes that were ascertained from the interviews. First, it was important for the principal to consider the contextual variables associated with each issue before selecting a decision-making strategy. The strategy-selection processes included principal-made decision-making, shared decision-making, and delegated decision-making. The themes that emerged through the interviews included (a) the guessperience of the principal, (b) the varying leadership styles of the principal, (c) the empowerment of ones' people, (d) the trust and confidence the principal places in his or her people, and (e) the ultimate authority of the principal.

CHAPTER FIVE

Overview of the Study, Conclusions, Recommendations, and Reflections

The purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of the study, and a discussion of the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the data with respect to the research question. Also, recommendations for practice, theory, and further research, and reflections concerning the research process and my administrative aspirations are included.

This chapter is divided into four sections: (a) overview of the study, (b) responses and conclusions to the research question, (c) recommendations for practice, theory, and further research, and (d) reflections.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how decisions are made in schools.

Research Problem

When decisions are made at the school level, how do principals decide when to (a) exercise their decision-making power, (b) share their decision-making power, or (c) delegate their decision-making power?

Sub-Problems

1. What contextual variables do principals contemplate in their decision-making practice?

2. Why and how do principals decide to deal with decisions unilaterally?
3. What kinds of decisions will the principal deal with unilaterally?
4. Why and how do principals decide to share their decision-making authority with others?
5. What kinds of decisions will the principal share with others?
6. Why and how do principals decide to delegate their decision-making authority?
7. What kinds of decisions will the principal delegate?
8. How do generic and unique decisions affect the decision-making process?

Review of the Literature

The review of the literature addressed decision-making at the administrative level. This review included seven major themes: (a) school based decision-making, (b) the nature of decision-making, (c) the responsibilities of the principal according to the School Act (1996), (d) shared decision-making, (e) delegated decision-making, (f) generic versus unique decision-making, and (g) creating a community of leaders.

Method

This research study was a qualitative study. Six participants from a Northern Alberta School district were interviewed. The data were collected through the use of a semi-structured interview schedule. The participants were ranked by a member of the central office staff according to criteria

established by the researcher. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically.

Responses and Conclusions to the Research Question

This study followed the preceding problem statement and the eight sub-questions. Following is a discussion of the sub-problems.

Sub-Problem One

What contextual variables do principals contemplate in their decision-making practice?

The contextual variables are defined as the elements of the decision-making process or the people in the organization that the principals contemplate when dealing with an issue. By definition, the contextual variables will be different in every school. Two groups of contextual variables emerged from the study: those which affect the people in the organization and those which affect the decision-making process.

The contextual variables which affect the people of the organization include: the students, the organization as a whole, and the staff and other stakeholders. Each participant identified the *student* as the focus of the educational system and the primary consideration of the administrator. Ryan stated this concept nicely:

> when the students are not the focus of the decision, you end up trying to appease one or more individuals or groups rather than focusing on the main purpose of schools. The main purpose of education to make sure the students are successful productive citizens with the skills, knowledge and attitudes they need when they leave the school.

The other participants concurred with Ryan and each expressed this idea in a similar manner. For example, Betty stated that before she makes a decision she considers

> What is it going to do for the students? How does it benefit the child? That's basically the decision that I'm involved in most of the time. As far as I'm concerned, education is for the child, of the child, by the child. Whatever decision I make it has to have a positive effect on the child.

Ellie suggested that "students drive the decision-making process at this school." She added that there were some issues that are related to the staff, but she first considers whether it is in the best interest of the students.

Similarly, Jack stated that one of the major themes that drives everything he does is the question: "What's in it for students?" He explained that everything must be in the best interests of the students. According to Jack, his philosophy of education is that "we are here for the kids and whenever I make a decision, that's the first question that jumps into my mind, is this in the best interest of kids?" Jack summarized his experiences as follows:

> The first year I started teaching, I asked myself three basic questions: 1. What am I going to do with my students today? 2. What's it good for? 3. How do I know? I made that up before I started my first teaching job. I consider myself a student-centered administrator and teacher and that is critical in my decision-making. When it comes down to a choice between a benefit for students or a benefit for another party whether that's a parent, staff or whatever, I tend to come down on the side of students.

These views are similar to the purpose of decentralization and school-based decision-making found in the literature. For example, Yanitski (1997) stated that the purpose moving the decision-making authority to the school level is to make decisions that would affect the learning outcomes of the students.

Second, the impact of the decision on *the organization* was found to be important among the participants. The participants stated that when making decisions, they have to consider how it will have an impact on the organization.

The *organizational considerations* discussed by the participants echoed Owens (1995) who suggested that "it is important to consider the mechanisms by which the organization... deals with decision-making" (p. 171). The participants supported Mark's view of organizational concerns. He stated that when he makes a decision "I think of the long term ramifications on the school."

The *staff and other stakeholders* were also important contextual variables in the decision-making process. The participants seemed to agree that when decisions that are made in the school affect others in the school such as the teachers, the teachers ought to have the opportunity to voice their opinions concerning the issue. According to Keith, "What I try to do is involve the people who are going to be impacted as much as possible."

Similarly, Betty suggested that anyone who would be affected by a change ought to be involved in the decision-making process.

The *staff and other stakeholders* were also mentioned as important considerations in the decision-making process in the literature. Liontos (1993) and Blase et al (1995) suggested that shared decision-making may improve the quality of decisions, strengthen staff morale and teamwork, build trust, and increase school effectiveness.

The second category of contextual variables that were described by the participants included the factors affecting the process of decision-making. These variables included importance, urgency, time factors, safety concerns, and the idiosyncratic behavior of the principals interviewed.

The *importance of the decision* was suggested by the participants to be a necessary consideration in the decision-making process. For instance, The other principals interviewed agreed with Ellie who suggested that it is necessary to consider the importance of the issue before deciding whether she will deal with the issue unilaterally, share it, or delegate the decision. Ellie explained that "Some things are minor. If it doesn't really matter to other people, then I'll make a decision."

Urgency was identified as another consideration. When dealing with an urgent need, the principals suggested that they would collect data quickly in order to make the decision promptly. Ryan, for example, pondered the issue, if the need were not urgent.

Another aspect was the *time factor* involved in the decision-making process. Some participants agreed with Keith who stated that there is the time element as well. In some instances, he needed to share or delegate decisions, because he may not have the time to deal with the issue in question.

The *safety* of the staff and students was found to be another variable in the decision-making process. Ellie suggested that when a safety concern occurs at her school, she contacts the appropriate people in an urgent manner to rectify the situation. For example, when a large hole was dug next to Thompson School, Ellie called the city, the contractors, and her ombudsman in order to have something done about the situation as quickly as possible.

The *idiosyncratic behavior* of each principal was, by definition, different for each participant. In connection with this factor, I focused on the influence of idiosyncratic behavior on the methods of data collection adopted by each respondent. Betty, for instance, collected data through formal and informal discussions with stakeholders. Mark tended to go to the research in order to determine what has been stated on a particular issue. Jack ensured that he had sufficient background knowledge on an issue before a decision was made. Keith appeared to rely on his *guessperience* and the *guessperience* of others. All of the participants considered the data collection stage to be essential. According to Jack,

> The information gathering, data gathering, all of the baseline kinds of data are really important to me. I seldom make decisions unless I have either experience with a situation involving decisions with other parties or ensuring that I've gathered the information through some process whether it's meeting with people, seeing it on paper, or getting it from different sources.

The study participants were also asked to describe their *values* about education and decision-making. They suggested that they valued these things: (a) being proactive; (b) setting goals; (c) putting first things first; (d) setting priorities and goals; (e) thinking win-win; (f) being student-centered; and (g) serving clients, namely: students and parents. Many of these values were found in the literature. For example, Covey (1989) discussed the habits of highly effective people. He stated that to achieve interdependence, one ought to be proactive, begin with the end in mind, put first things first, think win/win, synergize, seek first to understand then to be understood, and so forth.

The *beliefs* that the principals stated in the interviews were generally consistent: (a) every person can learn beyond the level that they are at; (b) education is a process and not an event; (c) every person has a right to get the best education that they can; (d) every person has the right to make a decision about how they are going to get the best education they can.

Sub-Problem Two

Why and how do principals decide to deal with decisions unilaterally?

The first strategy selection process for dealing with issues was when principals make a decision unilaterally. *Principal-made decisions* are those decisions that the principal makes without looking for agreement among the stakeholders. Although the principal may seek the views and opinions of others, ultimately he or she is going to make the decision. Principal-made decisions include not only decisions that principals make unilaterally, but also the decision to share or delegate a decision. Therefore, when the principal deals with an issue, he or she will consider who it will affect and make a decision about whether others need to be involved, and if so, who should be involved.

The participants provided a number of factors related to principal-made decisions. These components include the following: (a) decisions incumbent on their role as principal, (b) decisions that are confidential, (c) decisions that need to be made expediently, (d) decisions that are based on the experience of the administrator, (e) decisions to involve others, (f) decisions that appear to be unrelated to the interests of others, and (g) decisions that are urgent.

Decisions incumbent on the role as principal was echoed in the Alberta School Act (1996). The participants indicated that some of their responsibilities are described in the Act. Jack, for example, stated that

> Some things are clearly spelled out in the School Act in terms of the responsibility for the principal. Most staff need to understand that and do understand that there are times when the principal just has to call the shots and make the decision.

The participants discussed when others ought to be involved in the decision-making process and how to involve them. They agreed with Jack who stated that he shares decisions when there are political factors involved in the decision or if the impact of the decision will affect another group.

The decision to involve others is also discussed in the literature. Schermerhorn, Hunt, and Osborn (1997) suggested that the principal is at times forced to decide whether he or she ought to make decisions alone or whether to involve others in the organization. Also, Owens (1995) argued that "... administration is defined as working with and through other people to achieve organizational goals..." (p. 171).

One feature of principal-made decisions found in the literature, but implied in the interviews, was the idea that principals had an innate sense of what a good decision is. This is commonly referred to as one's "gut feeling." Many of the participants based much of their decision-making ability on their own experience, the experience of other administrators, the policy and procedures, and the input from the stakeholders and others. This idea of making the best decision based on one's experience, however, is related to the *guessperience* of the participant. For example, Keith stated

that "from our experiences, we try to come up with the best guess about whether people would want to be involved in a particular decision or not."

Innate decision-making ability of the principal is mentioned frequently in the literature. Schermerhorn, Hunt, and Osborn (1997) describe intuition as "the ability to know or recognize quickly the possibilities of a situation" (p. 363). Moreover, Salloum (1993) found that implicit knowledge was a factor in the decision-making of senior secondary schools. That is, when the principal made a decision in the school there were instances where there was "something *else* which people use to make decisions [italics added]" (p. 27).

Many principal-made decisions were based on the *guessperience* of the principal interviewed. They would make some decisions unilaterally because others who could be involved may have stated or suggested that they do not want to be involved in certain decisions. The opposite may also hold true. That is, based on the experience of the administrators, they may have experienced situations where they have been told by individual or groups that they should have been a part of the decision-making process. From those experiences principals tried to make the best guess about whether people would want to be involved in a particular decision or not. For instance, Keith stated

> In some cases it is based on experience. I or the administrative team will make some decisions because some people have or told us in the past that they don't necessarily want to be involved in that kind of decision. Based on experience, I ran into situations where I've been told by individuals that should have been a part of the decision-making process.

Another reason for a principal making unilateral decisions is that the principal can determine whether the *best interests of the students* are being considered. The concept of student-centeredness was seen to be an important characteristic of the principals interviewed. Ryan concurred with Betty who stated that "if I feel it's going to enhance a student's life, I'll make the decision on my own and say, 'Yes, we'll go for it, we'll get involved.'"

The respondents suggested that they make decisions so *others do not have to be involved in the process*. Many of those particular decisions seemed to deal with relatively minor issues. For instance, the decision made would have an impact on few people. Ellie suggested that:

> It doesn't make any difference. They wouldn't know the answer any better than I would. So I feel that I'm quite prepared to make that decision. Also, I'll make the decision because it is necessary.

Similarly, if the decision were not going to affect their day to day teaching and classroom activities, Mark suggested that many teachers do not want to be included in decision-making of that nature. Keith stated that based on experience he would make the best guess of whether a stakeholder would want to be involved in the decision-making process. This idea is reiterated

in the literature. Bridges' (1967) concept of the *zone of acceptance* suggested that because of the issue involved, the stakeholders would allow another person or group to make the decision. The teachers accepted the fact that the principal would make decisions of that nature.

In some cases the principal would make the decision because he or she is the most responsible person for his particular school, and should take the responsibility that goes with the decision. Further, Mark suggested that unless some of the stakeholders have aspirations for becoming principals, they may not want to be involved in management types of decisions. Betty and Ellie argued that involving teachers in some types of decision-making was a waste of their time and skills.

When the principal alone is involved in the decision-making, many decisions can be made *expediently*. Many of the routine decisions that the principal makes on a daily basis are quick and simple "yes" or "no" decisions. As a general rule, the more important the decision, the more data the principals collect and the more likely he or she is to involve others in some way.

Some of the decisions that the principal deals with are of a personal nature. Because of the *confidentiality* of these decisions, other persons may not be involved. Jack stated that "there are some decisions that I have make because of confidentiality issues." Examples of these types of decisions

would include the evaluation of teaching staff or dealing with a teacher in difficulty.

Another reason for unilateral decision-making of the principal is that because the principals all felt that they were ultimately accountable for the decisions that are made at the schools, they believe they ought to have control over the decisions that will make a difference on the image of the school and on the impact of the decision on the students. Whether the decision is made unilaterally by the principal, shared with others, or delegated to an individual or a group, ultimately the principal must accept the responsibility for the decisions that are made in the school. The principals stated that they were ultimately responsible for the decisions that were made at the school. Ellie stated that, "In the end it is my responsibility, so I'll make the call. My name is on the bottom line."

The ability of the principals to vary their leadership styles was an important factor in the unilateral decision-making of the principal at the school level. Depending on the issue involved, the principals could be collaborative or authoritative. However, because each of the participants believed it was necessary to involve stakeholders in the decision-making making process if they are going to be affected by the decision, their styles appeared to be predominantly collaborative.

In the analysis of the leadership styles of the principals, some of the participants maintained a high degree of control in the decision-making

process. When delegating decisions, for example, because the principal collects all or most of the background information concerning the issue, the implication is that "delegation" is more apparent than real. There was little room for individual expertise and ideas to emerge. The principals may have already had a preferred outcome in mind. For instance, the principal may say "here is the information, make a decision."

Leadership was viewed in the literature as "comprising a set of forces. ...each of the 'forces' can be used to push the school forward toward effectiveness or to prevent it from being pushed back" (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 100). Some of the participants seemed to utilize different leadership styles to act as the different forces identified by Sergiovanni. In some cases, the principals interviewed would make decisions to prevent the school from being "pushed back." For instance, when Ellie described a situation that was occurring in the classroom, if a decision were not made soon to rectify the situation, the education of the students was in jeopardy. Thus, the decision made by Ellie prevented the school from being "pushed back."

The participants felt that it was necessary to utilize different leadership styles. Betty and Ryan suggested that at times they must be authoritative and make the decision themselves. However, at other times they ought to use a more collaborative leadership style and involve others in the decision-making process or pass the decision-making power to

another staff member. This idea of varying leadership styles is addressed in the literature. Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn (1997) discussed Robert J. House's (1977) Path-Goal Theory of Leadership. Within this theory, House discussed various types of leadership behaviors, namely: directive, supportive, achievement oriented, and participative leadership behaviors.

Also, Owens (1995) discussed Vroom and Yetton's (1973) five leadership styles. To help the administrator select an appropriate leadership style, Vroom and Yetton also developed a flowchart that the administrator could follow. Sergiovanni (1991) stated that "successful leadership and management...are directed toward the improvement of teaching and learning for students" (p. 16). Further, Sergiovanni (1991) maintained that an effective principal would ensure that this happens.

Sub-Problem Three

What kinds of decisions will the principal deal with unilaterally?

In the decision-making practice of the participants, they make decisions unilaterally at the beginning, throughout, and at the end of the year. The participants stated that they are responsible for their legislated responsibilities which are stated in the School Act (1996). Jack stated that

> some things are clearly spelled out in the School Act in terms of the responsibility for the principal and ultimately those are your babies anyway. So most staff need to understand that and do understand that there is sometimes when the principal just has to call the shots and make the decision.

The examples of principal-made decisions that emerged from the interviews were similar among the participants. These decisions pertained to issues that involve discipline, budget allocations, staff, students, general operating procedures for the staff and students, and the collective agreement.

Ellie stated that some of the decisions she dealt with unilaterally included creating the timetable, establishing bell times, dealing with discipline, allocating the budget, and determining grade configurations.

Keith related decision-making to the management of the educational process, which included the facility, program, and personnel. Also, he stated that it was his responsibility to ensure that the philosophy of the school, district, and principal was kept in mind.

Jack made decisions on how he will plan the week. These decisions included the pre-school opening activities such as an evening workshop in August; a plan for the support staff; and notices to teaching staff. Also, he prepared for many pre-opening meetings with students and parents, as well as the registration of students who had been expelled the previous year and are asking to return.

Every day, Jack dealt with decisions that involve vandalism and state-of-the-building checks. He walked around the school in the morning to check for any vandalism and to check on the students. He also had daily interactions with the staff. Jack stated that he had to deal with the staff

when they arrive in the mornings. He also had to check his e-mail and inbasket. He needed to deal with numerous phone calls from businesses, external agencies, other schools, parents, and district office personnel.

Sub-Problem Four

Why and how do principals decide to share their decision-making authority with others?

The second strategy selection process was when the principal shared decisions with other staff members. The participants shared Mark's view that shared decision-making was the formal involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process. This view is related to Bauer (1992) who stated that

> Shared decision making is a process designed to push education decisions to the school level, where those closest to the children may apply their expertise in making decisions that will promote school effectiveness and ensure that the most appropriate services are provided to students and the school community. (Bauer, 1992, as cited in Liontos, 1993, p. 2)

Keith suggested that more people have become a part of decision-making processes in schools. He shares the authority to make decisions more now than in the past because "I've recognized the power of group decisions."

The participants indicated that the involvement of the stakeholders is necessary, if the decision will have an impact on them. For instance, Betty stated that

> if the issue or action affects other people, they need to be a part of the decision-making. I do not like to have things imposed upon me. If I have to live with it, I want to be a part of the decision-making process. ... Sometimes you get the other kind of response, but at least you are part of it and you can ask the questions that you want.

Also, the participants suggested that different people provide different perspectives on various issues. Ellie stated that,

> Getting as many viewpoints as possible. It's very easy to become one of these ivory tower people who just look out the window and say 'I see this.' You need to see the people who are working with things everyday to talk to you. You need to see that parent perspective. You need to see the student perspective.

Ryan maintained that the input of the stakeholders drives the decision-making process.

Similarly, Liontos (1993) echoed this view and added that "more satisfying decisions are made in groups that generated and tested ideas than are made by individuals or poorly functioning groups" (p. 13). She maintained that shared decision-making may improve the quality of decisions, improve the acceptance and implementation of the decisions, encourage staff morale and teamwork, build trust, and increase school effectiveness (Liontos, 1993). Also, Blase et al (1995) stated that

> when teachers and other stakeholders engage the principal and one another in authentic and open dialogue about what really matters, principals unanimously agree that outcomes improve when both teachers and principals collectively share the responsibility to initiate action and to make things better. (p. 10)

Another reason for shared decision-making, is to allow the stakeholders to have *ownership* over the decisions made in the schools,

especially if the decision affects them. If the staff "buy-in" to the decision, they will all work toward that common goal. Without this acceptance there is no motivation to make the decision work. Thus, the more input a person or a group has in a decision the better they are able to accept the decision and have a reason for it to be successful. Ellie maintained that

> I think the best changes that happen in schools occur when everyone is in agreement. Things where you work with the school council and you all sit down and come to a shared vision for things. It certainly is 'buy in.' ...We're going to make it [the decision] work because of the 'buy in.'

This view is related to Liontos' (1993) description of shared decision-making. She suggested that "as a result of shared decision-making, staff should have a greater impact on decisions, be better informed, and have greater commitment to making their decisions work" (p. 10).

On the other hand, some disadvantages of shared decision-making were also addressed in the literature. Kshensky and Muth (1991) suggested that "collaborative decision-making processes are time consuming, inefficient, and inconsistent with strong leadership." (p. 4).

Another disadvantage is the additional workload for the principal and the staff members. The principal has to determine who will be involved, why they will be involved, and how they will be involved. Also, time is taken away from the teacher's planning, marking, and other classroom responsibilities to be involved in administrative decision-making. (Sackney & Dibski, 1994).

In a similar vein, Keith and Betty suggested that a weaknesses of shared decision-making emerged when some of the stakeholders that should be involved in the decision were not. For example, Keith stated that "I ran into situations where I've been told by individuals that they should have been a part of the decision-making process." Also, Betty suggested that "I usually run into problems when I make a decision that I should have collaborated on." However, because Keith stated that most of the decisions he makes are based on experience, given a similar situation in the future, he would deal with it in a more suitable manner. As Ryan suggested, mistakes are looked upon as learning and growing experiences.

Each participant in the study seemed to have a similar systematic approach for involving stakeholders in the decision-making process. In shared decision-making, the participants appeared to follow Bridges' (1967) concept of *zone of acceptance*. The principals have to consider whether the decision would be within or outside of one's zone of acceptance. Bridges suggested that participation in decision-making would be more effective if the decision involving the stakeholder is being involved, is outside of his or her zone of acceptance. To facilitate this process, the principals could utilize the two tests developed by Bridges (1967): (a) the test of relevance and (b) the test of expertise. They could also utilize the test of commitment as determined by Hoy and Tarter (1995). The participants did not indicate any awareness of these theoretical

constructs. However, their method of determining whether a stakeholder would want to be included in the decision-making process was generally consistent with the literature.

The principals interviewed also suggested that they would use their experience to determine who should be involved in the decision-making process. This concept of *guessperience* is related to the implicit knowledge of the administrator. Thus, the principal has to ascertain whether the stakeholder's involvement in the decision-making process would be beneficial to the organization.

Keith maintained that when teachers are involved in the shared decision-making process, their opinions are being sought which makes them feel that their input is valued by the administration. This idea is discussed in the literature. Owens (1995) stated

> The use of participative decision-making has two major potential benefits: (1) arriving at better decisions and (2) enhancing the growth and development of the organization's participants (for example, greater sharing of goals, improved motivation, improved communication, better developed group-process skills). (p. 189)

Sub-Problem Five

What kinds of decisions will the principal share with others?

Some of the shared decisions suggested by the participants deal with policies, programs, evaluation of students or programs, management of the school, some discipline issues, and communication issues and initiatives. Other shared decisions deal with *changes* to any of those previously

mentioned areas, school operations, student conduct policy, school education plan, curriculum, new initiatives, marking and reporting, and shared decision-making with the vice-principals. Jack suggested that some schools have management meetings. Other shared decisions include the school newsletter, staff meetings, school council, and student council.

Sub-problem Six

Why and how do principals decide to delegate their decision-making authority?

The third strategy selection process for making decisions is the delegation of the decision-making authority. The participants described delegation as the movement of the decision-making authority from the principal to another stakeholder or stakeholders. Betty suggested that she normally delegated the responsibility for particular tasks or projects. Jack and Betty suggested that a typically delegated project is the implementation of computers into the curriculum. According to Betty:

> In delegation, we have to come up with a proposal for our school development plan. We've discussed what we want to do at staff meetings. One of the things is focus on technology and how you implement technology into the core subjects.

One of the major reasons for delegating as described by the participants is to utilize certain skills and talents that exist among the staff. Mark suggested that these skills and talents that some staff members possess are superior to those of the principal and therefore it would make sense to

delegate those tasks or responsibilities to the staff member who can do it effectively. However, he added that the principal takes the risk of allowing the delegate to surpass the principal in some areas of administration. This view is echoed by Thomas (1989) who suggested that delegating decisions is important because there may be staff members who possess skills or talents that would allow them to perform certain tasks more competently than the administrator.

Also, Richardson, Short, and Prickett (1993) suggested that some principals do not want to risk losing some of the control over the school. As the principal loses control another staff member may be gaining control over certain areas in the school.

The participants concurred that when a task or an activity is delegated to a subordinate, the principal has to consider the skills and talents of the subordinate to ensure that the responsibility reflects those skills and talents. For example, Jack wanted his vice-principal to take on the task of integrating a new computer information system into the school because of the computer expertise of the vice-principal. This view is reiterated in the literature. Thomas (1989) argued that the decisions the principal chooses to delegate to subordinates should be selected purposefully. Assigning tasks which match the skills or talents of the subordinates will allow individuals the opportunity to use their unique skills or talents or provide them with experience.

Keith suggested that when he delegates tasks to subordinates, he does so to allow the individuals to have positive learning and growing experiences. Similarly, Thomas (1989) maintained that the decisions delegated to others ought to provide learning experiences for the individuals.

Expediency was suggested by the participants as another reason for delegation. Jack stated that "You delegate because you know that you can't do it all yourself. So it is a survival strategy. ... one person can't do everything." Similarly, Yukl (1990) suggests that for decisions that need to be made expediently, delegation may be utilized.

Also, Keith suggested that delegation can *help the individual staff members themselves grow*. Part of the reason why the principals delegate is to give people the feeling that what they do is important in the hope that they will continue to grow and reach for other things that make them successful. Keith added that it is important for the staff members to have the opportunity to have new experiences. Some of these experiences come from what responsibilities the principals allow these people to have. The more experiences people have the better decisions they should be able to make.

The participants suggested that another reason for delegating decisions was that it allowed the stakeholders to have ownership for the decisions made in the school. Richardson, Short and Prickett (1993) would

agree that delegation gives the principals the opportunity to allow staff members greater involvement in school activities, by allowing those closest to the problems make the decisions that will have an impact on the problems. Further, Richardson, Short, and Prickett (1993) suggested that "delegation can foster commitment to and ownership of the school organization" (p. 102). The administrators stated that they had ownership for everything, but they wanted individual teachers to take ownership of decisions and responsibility for making decisions that affect them. When the delegates have ownership of the decisions, there is more motivation to achieve the desired outcome.

Emergent factors that related to delegation. Concepts such as *guessperience, position, and expertise* emerged as reasons for delegating to certain people. Each person would be expected to make decisions which affect their individual responsibilities in the school. The vice-principal and the secretary of the school, for example, would not be given the same responsibilities.

Preparing a delegate for delegation. The participants discussed ways that they prepared a staff member for delegation. Some methods for preparing someone for delegation included utilizing a mentorship program, gathering all of the background information necessary to assist the delegate in the decision-making process, ensuring that the delegate understands the importance of the task, and monitoring or being kept current on the task.

Betty and Ellie discussed the use of mentoring in their schools. Betty stated, "If it's a first year teacher then they are always buddied with someone." Ellie explained that she utilizes a mentorship program at her school. Jack felt that it was necessary to collect the data for the delegate on a particular initiative. Similarly, Richardson, Short, and Prickett (1993) discussed Yukl's (1990) five strategies for delegating effectively. The points raised by Yukl (1990) are the following:

> (1) determine how much authority is necessary; (2) insure teacher comprehension; (3) obtain teacher acceptance of responsibilities; (4) monitor teacher progress; (5) provide assistance and psychological support; and (6) discourage excessive dependence. (Richardson, Short, & Prickett, 1993, p. 103)

Monitoring the progress of the delegate that was suggested by the respondents was inconsistent with the literature. Yukl (1990) stated that the principal ought to monitor the teachers progress; however, some of the participants did not like the term "monitor." They felt that by monitoring their progress, they were looking over their shoulders. This was thought to undermine the trust and confidence the principal had in his or her delegates. A more appropriate term was "being kept-up-to-date" on a particular initiative.

Delegation also leads to the empowerment of subordinates. The participants suggested that empowerment of teachers is one of the benefits of delegated decision-making. Keith stated that, "Other people need to be empowered to make decisions at whatever level they are involved." With

delegation, the teachers are being given the full responsibility to complete a task or a project.

The idea of empowerment is echoed in the literature. For example, Sergiovanni (1990) stated that "Empowerment is practiced when authority and obligation are shared in a way that authorizes and legitimizes action, thus increasing responsibility and accountability" (p. 96). Also, Bredeson (1989), maintained that shared decision-making increases teacher's responsibility for the decision-making which improves work life and job satisfaction (Liontos, 1993). Further, Lieberman (1988) suggested that if there is to be a community of leaders in the school, opportunities for teachers to take on responsibilities must be provided for in the schools. The teachers ought to receive more of the power associated with decision-making and ought to feel accountable for the results.

The relationship between delegation and trust and confidence the principal has in the staff members. When the participants suggested that they delegate to subordinates, they all stated that they have trust and confidence in their teachers. Ryan commented that along with delegating the responsibility for decisions comes the trust and confidence from the principal that the teachers will be able to do the job effectively and this in turn, bolsters their self-confidence.

Similarly, Kshensky and Muth (1991) suggested that both the principal and the teachers are empowered through mutual trust and mutual

influence. Also, Blase et al (1995) discussed three recurrent themes that develop when principals exercise a more democratic leadership: "trust in teachers' motives; the ability to listen and communicate more openly; and the willingness to risk letting go of their traditional veto power." (p. 11).

Sub-Problem Seven

What kinds of decisions will the principal delegate?

The principals interviewed delegated administrative responsibilities to the vice principals regarding student discipline, attendance, and provincial achievement tests. Decisions that pertain to subject departments, programs of studies, and courses within department areas are often delegated either to an administrator or to an MRP. Special initiatives are assigned to specific people. Teaching duties and responsibilities for supervision, extra curricular activities, communication with parents, student progress and attendance are all delegated to specific people.

Sub-Problem Eight

How do generic and unique decisions affect the decision-making process?

Principals, based on their experience, have dealt with many different types of decisions. The types of decisions dealt with in this study include generic and unique decisions. Generic decisions are those decisions with which the participants have had past experience. Similarly, Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn (1997) defined routine decisions as programmed decisions that could be made quickly because a similar solution had been determined

in the past. Conversely, unique decisions refer to decisions in which the administrator has not had any experience. Schermerhorn, Hunt, and Osborn (1997) defined unique solutions as those decisions that "require more information processing to make performance possible" (p. 181). The participants in the study had different opinions concerning unique decisions. Ryan stated that most decisions could be considered unique depending on the context. Keith, on the other hand, felt that there was not much unique in education anymore. He suggested that most issues had been addressed at some point in education. An example that Jack and Betty felt was a unique decision was the integration of technology in the curriculum.

Another aspect of unique decision-making is *ownership* of the decision. Ellie suggested that if she brought up a decision and it proved to be successful, then the stakeholders may support the decision. However, if it fails then the stakeholders may say that they did not like the idea anyway. Thus, for a decision, in this case a unique decision, to work, the principal needed to have the stakeholders support the decision from the beginning of the initiative.

The participants suggested that unique decision-making fosters the development of two important concepts. First, unique decisions can *set a precedent*. Once a decision is made about an issue, it is difficult to alter once everyone "catches wind of it." Second, *unique decisions may become generic decisions*. If a decision is made and the outcome is successful, there

is a high probability that the decision-making process will be repeated. Also, if there were problems associated with the decision that was made, a generic safeguard may be developed to protect against such a situation.

The participants identified many differences between generic and unique decisions. First, the most obvious difference was that with generic decisions, much of the *background information* is already known by the stakeholders. However, with unique decisions, the principal, the staff, and the other stakeholders would have to gather, collect, and analyze more data before a decision could be made. Thus, unique decisions tend to take more time, work, and preparation.

Another difference between generic and unique decisions is that generic decisions have *more parameters*. It is much easier to work within guidelines, policies, or procedures that have already been established then to undertake a new initiative and develop the parameters that support the initiative and fit with the philosophy of the district and the school.

Other major features of unique decision-making suggested by Jack, Betty, and Ellie were that unique decisions take more time, may involve creative solutions, provide more opportunities for the staff and others to make decisions that will have positive and interesting results on the students.

Finally, the participants suggested that generic decisions tend to be *made more quickly* than unique decisions. Because generic decisions are

either based in policy or on the experience of the principal, they can be made quicker than unique decisions.

These features of generic and unique decisions are reiterated in the literature. Schermerhorn, Hunt, and Osborn (1997) discussed complex tasks which are those tasks that technically are more demanding. They also suggested that there are three factors to complex tasks. First, they have not been seen by others in the past; therefore they are new. Second, desired outcomes are more difficult to attain and more time consuming. Finally, the information surrounding the tasks is more disperse; thus, they are more difficult to solve. Generally, if the principal were able to use his or her guessperience on a decision, this would assist the principal to deal with unique decisions and complex tasks.

Conclusions

The following statements and generalizations are the conclusions to the research questions. They are based on the findings of the study and will be summarized in this section.

Conclusion 1. The contextual variables were found to the major considerations in the decision-making process. These variables comprised two categories: people in the organization and factors affecting the decision-making process.

Conclusion 2. The reasons why the principals interviewed made decisions unilaterally included: (a) decisions incumbent on their role as

principal, (b) decisions that are confidential, (c) decisions that need to be made expediently, (d) decisions that are based on the experience of the administrator, (e) decisions to involve others, (f) decisions that appear to be unrelated to the interests of others, and (g) decisions that are urgent.

Conclusion 3. The principals interviewed involved others in the decision-making process, for the following two reasons: (a) the input and involvement of other stakeholders added to the power of the decision; and (b) when the stakeholders felt a sense of ownership of the decisions, they were motivated and dedicated to ensure that the result was positive.

Conclusion 4. Empowerment of stakeholders occurred: (a) when the stakeholders were solicited for their input on an issue; and (b) when the stakeholders were delegated responsibilities.

Conclusion 5. The delegation practices of the principals interviewed were consistent with the literature. However, the idea that principals monitor delegated decisions in the literature was refuted by the participants. They suggested that instead of monitoring, which was compared to looking over the delegates' shoulder, they would rather have the delegate keep them up-to-date on the progress of the decision, and "bounce" possible ideas of them before a final decision is made.

Conclusion 6. The *guessperience* of the participants was found to be an essential ingredient in unilateral decisions, shared decisions, and delegated decisions. The principals interviewed could not clearly articulate

why they made certain decisions; therefore, such decisions may be related to the implicit knowledge of the principal.

Conclusion 7. Generic and unique decisions were found to different for the following reasons: (a) generic decisions are normally based on experience and/or policy, therefore they can be dealt with more quickly than unique decisions; (b) unique decisions take more time, preparation, and work; and (c) generic decision have more parameters.

Conclusion 8. Mentoring was a preferred method in preparing first year teachers for delegation.

Conclusion 9. The principals interviewed had an abundance of trust and confidence in their staff to make decisions in the best interests of students; however, because the principals felt that they were ultimately accountable for the decisions that were made at their schools, they reserved the final veto power.

Conclusion 10. Although the principals interviewed never suggested that they followed a particular model for making decisions, their actions for sharing decisions and involving others in the decision-making process were consistent with what was stated in the literature. In addition, with the exception of monitoring the progress, the steps to delegation were paralleled in the literature.

Overview of the Literature and Themes

The literature that paralleled the various themes and strategies that were developed in this study are depicted in figure 3.

Categories (C) and strategies (S)	Literature
(C) Contextual Variables - Students - Organization - Staff & stakeholders - Importance - Time factors - Idiosyncratic behavior - Values and Beliefs	Stephen R. Covey (1989)
(S) Principal-made decisions - incumbent on the role - confidentiality - expediency - principal has the authority - experience - involvement - importance and urgency	School Act (1996) - section 15.
(S) Shared decision-making - Input and involvement - A consensus - Ownership - Examples	Hoy and Tarter (1995) Bridges (1967) Hoy & Miskel (1996) Liontos (1993) Sackney & Dibski (1994) Blase, Blase, Anderson, & Dungan (1995) Myers (1997) Shermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn (1997)
(S) Delegated decision-making - Share the load - Time management - Identification of skills and talents - Individual growth - Ownership - Monitoring/Being kept current on new developments	Thomas (1989) Richardson, Short, & Prickett (1993) Yukl (1990)
(C) The types of decisions: generic and unique	Drucker (1966) Hoy & Miskel (1996) Shermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn (1997)
(C) The empowerment of one's people	Kshensky & Muth (1991) Blase, Blase, Anderson, & Dungan (1995) Liontos (1993)
(C) The *guessperience* of the principals	Salloum (1993) Shermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn (1997)
(C) The ultimate authority of the principal	N/A
(C) Trust and confidence in one's people	N/A

Figure 3. Themes and Literature

Recommendations for Practice, Theory, and Future Research

This section presents some possible suggestions for practice, theory, and future research that relates to principals and the decision-making process.

Recommendations for Practice

Upon analysis of the literature review, interviews, and conclusions, it became apparent that many principals utilize a variety of leadership styles. The principals of Caribou School District contended that if a decision is going to have an impact on the learning experiences of the students and the growing experiences of the teachers, then the teachers who are ultimately having that close contact and developing a strong relationship with the students ought to be involved in decisions of that nature.

In the schools the principals ought to make it a common practice to involve the teachers in any decisions that will have an impact on what they do it the classroom. This involvement may involve sharing decisions with the teachers or delegating responsibilities to them. In both situations the skills and the confidence of the teachers will be enhanced and the stakeholders with have more ownership of the decision.

The knowledge of who to involve in the decision and how they should be involved seemed to emerge from the *guessperience* of the administrator which is consistent with Bridges' (1967) zone of acceptance. Based on the administrator's experience, he or she can make the best

conjecture of whether to involve people and which people ought to be involved in a given decision. Also, the *guessperience* may not necessarily be that of the principal in question, it may be the experience of another individual with whom the principal may consult. Therefore, a useful practice for the beginning principal would be to develop a relationship with an experienced administrator or administrators. When the beginning principal is faced with difficult or unique issues, it may prove to be beneficial to "bounce" ideas off these more experienced administrators or ask for advice about how to deal with a difficult situation.

Also, beginning administrators may want to develop practical reflective practices. For example, they may wish to keep a journal of their daily activities and decision-making practices. This would allow the principal to reflect upon his or her experiences over the past year. It would also allow the principal to do a comparison between different years in a school.

Also, when hiring new staff members, the principals can state the responsibilities the prospective employee will have to assume in the job description.

A final recommendation is that the principal and vice-principal should meet on a daily basis to determine what decisions one another had made the previous day. In that way, either the principal or the vice-

principal can explain why a certain decision was made to a parent, teacher, or student.

Recommendations for Theory

This study is significant because it shed light on why and how administrators make decisions unilaterally, shared decisions, and delegated decisions. The conceptual framework developed by the researcher, in conjunction with Drucker's 1966 concept of generic and unique decisions, demonstrates the researcher's perception of the decision-making process at the school level. Principals, utilizing guessperience, choose to make a decision unilaterally or to share or delegate that decision. If the decision is made to share or delegate the decision, it may still return to the principal for the final decision. With delegated decisions, the principal may simply monitor or ask to be kept informed about developments on the decision made by an individual or a group. Conversely, the principal may opt to be part of the decision-making process. The same holds true for both unique and generic decisions. As compared with delegated decisions, the principal is more involved in the actual decision-making with shared decisions. However, the principal's involvement may differ depending on the relevance of the issue to the principal and the urgency and importance of the decision to the school.

The conceptual framework (figure 4) has been developed from the review of the literature and the results of the pilot study to show the

relationships between delegated, shared, and principal-made decisions which are either generic or unique. They are delimited to primary decisions.

With an initial focus on Drucker's observation of generic and unique decisions, the model has been expanded to allow for a more thorough conceptualization of the decision-making processes. As the arrows on figure 4 demonstrate, once the decision comes to the attention of the principal, he or she will decide whether to delegate the decision, share the decision, or deal with the decision unilaterally.

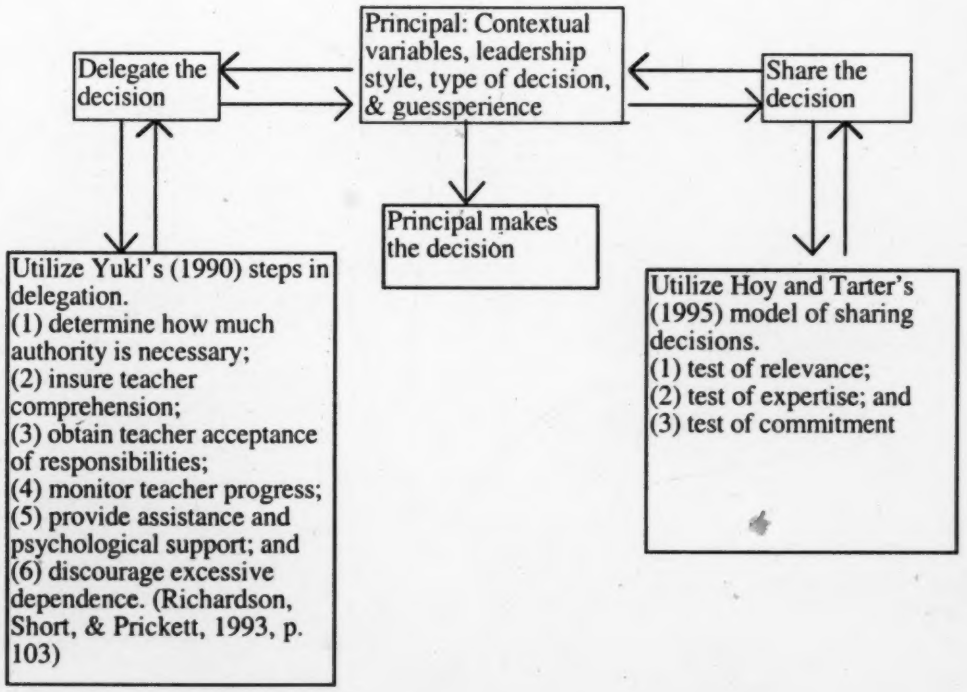
Principal: Contextual variables, leadership style, type of decision, & guesssperience
Delegate the decision
Share the decision
Principal makes the decision
Utilize Yukl's (1990) steps in delegation.
(1) determine how much authority is necessary;
(2) insure teacher comprehension;
(3) obtain teacher acceptance of responsibilities;
(4) monitor teacher progress;
(5) provide assistance and psychological support; and
(6) discourage excessive dependence. (Richardson, Short, & Prickett, 1993, p. 103)
Utilize Hoy and Tarter's (1995) model of sharing decisions.
(1) test of relevance;
(2) test of expertise; and
(3) test of commitment

Figure 4. Principals and the Decision-Making Process

With shared decision-making, it appeared from the interviews that the participants utilized a model similar to that developed by Hoy and Tarter (1995). After discussion of an issue, and the making of a preliminary decision, the principal usually retains the ultimate veto power.

When the principals interviewed chose, following the data gathering, to delegate the decision, the process appears to have paralleled the steps suggested by Yukl (1990). The principal delegates the decision to an MRP (most responsible person). The MRP keeps the principal up-to-date on new developments. One difference between the steps in the process described by the participants and Yukl's steps for delegation is that most of the principals did not want to monitor decisions. They felt that monitoring was comparable to looking over ones' shoulder. They preferred to be kept up-to-date on the progress of the initiative by the MRP. Once the MRP has ascertained a suitable decision, he or she will discuss it with the principal "for the final say."

Recommendations for Further Research

This section provides possible ideas for future research.

First, it is recommended that this study by replicated in different locations and times. Replicating the study in a different situation would allow for new cultural insights and different philosophies to combine to add to the conceptual model.

Second, a look at the teachers' perceptions and opinions about the decision-making processes of the administrator would be an interesting study. It may be beneficial to look at how the two perspectives compare. *From the perspective of the teachers, how are decisions made at the school level?*

Third, a study could be conducted on the satisfaction of the teachers with their involvement in the decision-making process at their schools. *What is the perception of teacher satisfaction with their involvement in the decision-making process?*

Fourth, a study could be conducted which compares the opportunity for involvement in the decision-making process between male and female stakeholders. *Do male and female stakeholders have equal opportunities to be involved in the decision-making process at the school level?*

Reflections

The reflections from this study will be divided into two sections: reflections on the process and reflections as an aspiring administrator.

Reflections on the Process

I learned very early in the study that it is important to focus your research problem and stick with one particular direction. It was very easy to allow people and literature detract me from my initial research problem. The literature on the topic of decision-making is quite extensive; however, when I focused on one aspect of decision-making it became quite difficult

to find current literature on my particular topic. I found it very useful to look through the reference section of other theses on decision-making to find suitable materials. However, I was still forced to spend countless hours doing research in the library.

I found the interviewing process to be an excellent experience. I enjoyed spending time talking with administrators about the decision-making processes at their schools. I found that by audio-recording the interviews, I was able to collect an abundance of information from each participant. The only concern I had was whether the audio-recorder was working properly.

The transcribing process was extremely cumbersome. I discovered that a one hour interview took roughly four hours to transcribe. However, if I had to do it again, it would. I think I would prefer to transcribe the interviews personally. By the end of the transcribing process, I was well aware of the contents of each transcription.

When I was analyzing the data, I found it very useful to search for my deductive themes before the inductive themes. By highlighting the deductive themes in each transcription, the inductive themes were much easier to identify.

I found the audit trail to be very satisfying. After spending a number of months collecting and analyzing the data, I was relieved that the person conducting the audit trail found the same themes as did I.

Overall, I enjoyed the research process. It helped me to understand what research entails and I believe I am much more knowledgeable about the research method and about other studies that are discussed on television or in the newspaper. It is not a "foreign language" to me anymore.

Reflections as an Aspiring Administrator

During this study, I learned to see what administration is through the eyes of the principal. I was able to discuss how the decisions are made from their perspectives. Each participant identified similar methods of dealing with various issues.

I learned that as an administrator, I would not be alone at my school. There are many people with different skills, talents, and experiences that I could seek the advise of, in my school or in other schools within the district. Each principal stated that there were times when they had to seek the advice of a more experienced administrator. The individuals grew as administrators, and they suggested that the amount of times they sought advise from others had decreased over the years. This is a very encouraging idea. It makes me feel that I will learn and grow as a principal. Because I believe in the concept of lifelong learning, I feel that that is a part of being an administrator.

Another reflection is that decision-making is a process. It is important to keep the process in mind when making decisions. Whether to involve others in the decision-making process or to make decisions

unilaterally, it is important to consider the process of making decisions. The outcome will be identified by stakeholders in the educational system, but I feel that people can learn from experiencing various methods utilized to solve problems or handle various situations.

Finally, although not always stated, I feel that it is important to ensure that the students are the focus of the decision-making process. It is easy to drift away from that as the focus of one's decision-making. However, there needs to be a balance between what the students want and what is best for the students. The principal has to consider if doing what the students want is going to be in the best interest of the students. This will be a focus of mine as I pursue a career in administration.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of this chapter was to present an overview of the study, and a discussion of the findings and conclusions drawn from the analysis of the data with respect to the research question. Also, recommendations for practice, theory, and further research were discussed. In addition, a section on the my reflections concerning the research process and as an aspiring administrator were discussed.

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Appendix A

Interview schedule

1. How long have you been in the field of education?

2. How long have you been a principal?

3. How large is your school? Staff?

4. Briefly describe you professional experience. Academic experience.

5. What do you consider when you make a decision?

    - Why are these considerations important?

6. How would you describe your decision-making practice?

    - Who has influenced your decision-making practice?

    - How have they influenced your decision-making practice?

7. Tell me what decisions you make on your own. Please include decisions made at the beginning of the year, before the other teachers arrive at the school; decisions made while you walk around the school; and decisions made during the regular operation of the school during the school year.

    - Why would you make these decisions on your own?

8. Tell me what decisions you would share. Please include decisions made before the school year begins and decisions that need to be made throughout the year.

9. Why would you share these decisions?

10. How do you decide who to include in the decision-making process?

11. Tell me what decisions you delegate. Please include decisions made at the beginning of the year, before the other teachers arrive at the school; and decisions made during the regular operation of the school during the school year, to make the school operate efficiently.

    - Why would you delegate these decisions?

12. What unique principal-made decisions have you made?

    - Why did you make these decisions personally?

13. What unique decisions have you shared?

    - Why did you share these decisions?

14. What unique decisions have you delegated?

    - Why did you delegate these decisions?

15. What is a consensus?

16. How do you prepare first year teachers for delegation?

17. Do you have any final comments?

Appendix B

Letter of Consent

Please read and sign the following Letter of Consent.

I (print name) _____ understand that I am participating in a study entitled Administrative Decision Making. The purpose of this study is to investigate why and how principals exercise their decision-making power, share their decision-making power, or delegate their decision-making power to get an understanding of how decisions are made in schools.

I understand that I have been identified as a candidate for this study by an executive of the central office staff in my district because of my success and experience as a principal. This interview will be approximately 60 to 90 minutes in duration. The interview will be recorded using an audio recorder. Upon the completion of the transcription of the interview, I will be given a copy of the transcripts to ensure its accuracy. At this point I may remove any statement from the transcript and it will not be used in the study.

I understand that I have the right to opt out at anytime before the completion of the first draft of the thesis. I understand that the interviewer will maintain my confidentiality.

_____ _____

(Signature of participant) (Date)

_____ _____

(Signature of Interviewer) (Date)

Appendix C

Letter of Confirmation

Dear Colleague,

I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. The title of the study is administrative decision-making. The purpose of this study is to investigate why and how principals decide to exercise their decision-making power, share their decision-making power, or to delegate their decision-making power. Furthermore, what decisions principals make personally, share, and delegate will be investigated.

You have been identified as a candidate for my study by an executive of the central office staff in your district because of your success and experience as a principal.

The study will consist of one 60 - 90 minute semi-structured interview. I would like to remind you that I will maintain confidentiality and your name will be replaced with a pseudonym. Furthermore, you may opt out of the study at anytime before the first draft of the thesis is complete. I will give you a copy of our interview transcript to ensure its accuracy. At this point you may remove any statement from the transcript and it will not be used in the study.

If you have any questions feel free to contact me at _____ or by e-mail at _____.

I will be in contact with you during the latter part of May 1998.

Sincerely

Todd Pruden